

# AMAZING

The cover features a striking illustration. In the foreground, a figure in a white, full-body protective suit and a helmet with a visor is shown from the chest up, with arms raised. In the background, two more similar figures are hanging from a structure resembling a gallows or a cross, set against a bright orange and red sky. The overall tone is dark and ominous.

ANC

NOVEMBER, 1954

STORIES

356



## BLESSED ARE THE MURDEROUS

By Ivar Jorgensen

Challenging

New Fiction **BATTLEGROUND** By William Morrison

NOVEMBER, 1954

AMAZING STORIES

VOL. 28 NO. 5

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# AMAZING

## STORIES

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NOVEMBER 1954

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# point of order . . .

● We ask the reader's permission to pause for a moment or two and indulge in that great American pastime of viewing with alarm. We are not chronic viewers with alarm by any means, but once in a while a situation arises, such as—

The impression Hollywood is giving the public of science-fiction in general. Relative to this, two recent pictures come to mind. *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, and *Them*. Also, two pictures which made the rounds some time ago—*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, and *The Thing*. Not being movie critics, we will classify them only in the undeniable category of Horror Pictures, and thereby lies our plaint; that in the vast public mind, science-fiction is certainly becoming synonymous with horror. And that's bad.

Well now, isn't it? Why should this genre—which is thought of by every true fan as a medium for reflecting the challenge of the vast new frontiers—be used by Hollywood only as a means of getting bigger and better horror pictures across? Used in this manner, it is certainly not a genre at all. It becomes merely an excuse to move *Dracula* to Mars, transfer *Frankenstein* to Neptune, and shift *The Lost World* possibly to one of the uncharted asteroids.

It is with pleasure, therefore, that we are able to report favorably on a picture called *Conquest of Space* which may already be in your neighborhood. It is a George Pal production released by Paramount and is exactly what the title implies—the account of the first flight to Mars. But not with bems, monsters, vegetable men, or flop-footed midgets. We horned in on an advance showing and found it to be a tense drama of human beings embarked on a great adventure—almost documentary in its stark realism.

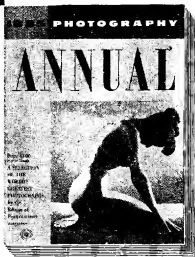
Walter Brooke, a comparative unknown, is starred, but we have a feeling he'll be no longer unknown after the release date. Actors have been turned into stars by even weak vehicles and you can expect some pretty strong stuff in this new science-fiction film.

And that's the good part. It is science-fiction; a film giving the genre a dignity and dramatic impact that it well deserves.

But, being born pessimists, we are still fearful; afraid that as soon as this Walter Brooke become box office, they'll give him a fright-wig and a shock-mask and say, "Boy, we're putting you in a real epic! We're calling it *The Thermometer Man from Mercury* and it'll gross like crazy. This science-fiction is hot stuff!"

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# SELL IT TO SATAN

By MILTON LESSER

*The rain would do more than ruin Meropa's complexion; it would destroy her completely! So Jeremy dragged her into one of those gyp auction houses for shelter—only to discover that the Devil himself was out looking for bargains!*

DOWN splattered the first fat drops of rain on the canyons of the city.

"Oh, hurry. Please hurry!" cried Meropa. "I'll melt."

"You'll *what*?" said Jeremy Smith.

"The rain, silly. I'll melt. I melt in the rain."

Jeremy leered at her. This is what he got for arguing with his wife, wandering down into Greenwich Village, drinking more than he should and picking up a red-haired girl with green eyes and the improbable name of Meropa. "What then?" Jeremy asked.

"What do you mean, what then?"

"After you melt. What happens then?"

Thunder boomed distantly. Meropa shrieked and clutched Jeremy's lapels in despair.

"I'll disappear. After you melt, you just disappear."

Meropa dodged and darted. It was still only a fat drizzle.

They were standing near the display window of a store which could have been a pawn shop with its odd collection of masks, musical instruments, costume jewelry and nameless other things behind the glass. The sign over the door said: AUCTION TODAY.

"I'm going to melt," Meropa warned Jeremy for the third time.

The door to the auction shop opened. The door bell tinkled. A little man with an enormous nose and eyes like black buttons stood in the doorway and smiled at them. "I heard you," he said. "Come right in."

"What for?" Jeremy de-



Jeremy ran as though the Devil, himself, was at his heels.

manded. The man had a greedy smile.

"So the young lady doesn't melt, of course."

Meropa followed the little man into the store, smiling gratefully at him. Jeremy was about to shrug off the whole ridiculous affair and return home contritely to his wife. He paused at the threshold of the auction shop. He'd need a peace offering and thought he might be able to find one here.

"Sit right down," said the little long-nosed man. "We're just starting."

Jeremy sat in the only vacant seat, which was next to Meropa. "The proprietor acted almost like he knew you," Jeremy said.

"He heard me say I'll melt. We're all brethren here."

"Brethren?"

"Shh! He's starting."

The place had a musty smell. Folding chairs had been arranged in neat rows across the width of the shop. The customers looked as if they were on their way to or from a costume ball. Well, it's Greenwich Village, thought Jeremy. In Greenwich Village you could expect anything.

The little long-nosed black-button-eyed man banged a gavel on the counter. The babble in the audience subsid-

ed. The musty smell was still there.

"Here we have," said the little man, holding up a small round yellow object, "the last remaining Golden Apple of the Hesperides. Our good friend Mr. Midas has collected all the others."

There was a muted sound of laughter in the room.

"What am I bid?" asked the little man.

"Five dollars."

"Ten."

"Twelve-fifty."

"Fifteen."

Jeremy remained quiet. His wife would have no use for a little yellow apple-like sphere. In fact, she hated apples.

"Twenty-five dollars," said a beautiful girl with blonde hair. "I've got to have that apple." There were no other bids and the blonde hip-wagged forward to retrieve her apple.

Meropa squeezed Jeremy's hand. "Aren't you happy?" she said. "Eris finally got her apple back."

A man named Midas bid for and got several items of gold costume jewelry. A young man with the strange name of Mr. Bellerophon outbid the rest of them for the bronze statue of a winged horse. Miss Leda purchased the graven



replica of a swan. Everyone thought it was very appropriate.

"And now," said the little man, rubbing his enormous nose until the tip was gleaming, "we come to the high spot of this or any auction." He held aloft a large, beautiful leather handbag with a dazzling, white metal clasp upon which was carved the face of a lovely woman or a hideous dragon, depending on how you viewed the clasp. Dora, Jeremy's wife, would love that handbag. Jeremy was suddenly very happy that Meropa had led him into the auction store.

"... handbag given to Perseus by the Nymphs of the North," the auctioneer was saying, still polishing his nose with one hand. "In it, Perseus put the Gorgon's head, but the charm of the bag, as you know, is this: it can accommodate items of any size at all. The mythologies will tell you that the bag can assume the proper size and shape to hold a ping-pong ball or—heh-heh—a locomotive. This is incorrect. Actually, the bag remains the same size but can change the dimensions of anything you put in it. What am I bid?"

"Is he kidding?" Jeremy asked Meropa.

Meropa squeezed his hand again. "Of course not. I want that pocketbook, Jeremy. I'll do anything. Anything."

"Watch," said the auctioneer. He opened the handbag at one end of the long counter which ran the length of the store. He made a scooping motion with the handbag. The long counter and the display shelves under it disappeared. Smiling, the auctioneer reached into the handbag and plucked out a toy model of the counter, placing it down on the floor. Jeremy blinked. The counter assumed its normal size again.

"It's mine!" someone in the back of the room shouted. "You have no right to auction it."

"That's Perseus," Meropa told Jeremy.

"Give me that handbag," Perseus said.

But the auctioneer shook his head, reached into the bag, drew out a little yellow ticket. "Your pawn ticket, Mr. Perseus," he said. "You couldn't reclaim it."

"I can reclaim it now. No one else has a right to bid. I'll give you fifty dollars."

Jeremy whistled. That was a lot of money, but Dora would just love that handbag. "Fifty-five," said Jeremy.

"You're a darling," Meropa told him.

Mr. Perseus made a horrible grimace. "Sixty."

"I hear sixty," said the auctioneer.

It had to be a trick, Jeremy thought. No handbag could make things become smaller like that. Still, he had to try the trick himself. Mirrors inside the bag, probably.

"Sixty-five," Jeremy said.

"Seventy," Perseus said.

Just then a billowing cloud of sulphurous smoke enveloped the room. Jeremy gagged, blew his nose, wiped his eyes. A sun-burned man wearing a black rain-slicker and a devilish smile on his face sat perched on the edge of the counter. "I want that gadget," the man with the devilish smile said. "I'll give you a hundred dollars."

Mr. Perseus glowered but remained silent. Everyone was looking at the man with the black rain-slicker.

"I thought Perseus said it was his," Jeremy told Meropa.

"Naturally, but no one dares bid against Mr. Scratch."

"What a strange name," said Jeremy, who had never done much reading.

Mr. Scratch said, "Well?"

"Going," said the auctioneer, "going—"

"A hundred and five," Jeremy called.

Meropa poked her elbow in his ribs. "You don't understand. I said no one dares bid against Mr. Scratch."

"Just who the hell does he think he is?" Jeremy wanted to know.

"Yes," said Meropa. "Oh, yes!"

There was a shocked silence in the room. The auctioneer was busy rubbing his nose furiously. It was so shiny now, you could see the handbag reflected in it.

"Young man," said the devilishly smiling man, pointing a long finger at Jeremy, "do I understand correctly? You are bidding against me?"

"It's my money," said Jeremy. "This is a public auction, isn't it?"

The devilishly smiling man turned to the auctioneer. "Just who is this fellow?"

"I don't know, but his girl friend melts in the rain, Mr. Scratch, sir."

"I said a hundred and five," Jeremy pointed out.

Mr. Scratch took the handbag from the long-nosed auctioneer. "All I brought with me," he said, "was a hundred

and thirty-one dollars, fifty-four cents. I bid that now."

I'm being extravagant, Jeremy thought. But Dora will love it. And I've got to try that trick. And just who the hell does this big shot think he is, anyway? "A hundred and thirty-five," said Jeremy.

"You don't understand," Mr. Scratch said. "This bag is just the thing for collecting souls. I get so many these days, you know. Will you kindly retract your bid?"

Jeremy stood up and shook his fist at Mr. Scratch. "Absolutely not. This is a democratic country." He walked toward the counter.

"I'll bid two hundred," Mr. Scratch told the auctioneer. "On credit."

"No credit, sir. Not even from you. It's the law."

"But surely you know I can make good, what with all my rich clients!"

The auctioneer cringed but said, "It's the law, sir. I am sorry."

"I've got to have that bag," declared Mr. Scratch.

"If the young gentleman will reconsider," the auctioneer said hopefully.

"Hell, no. Give it to me."

"Going," said the auctioneer. "Going . . . gone!"

Mr. Scratch tossed the bag

to Jeremy. "I'll get it back," he predicted.

This close, Mr. Scratch smelled of decay and sulphur. Like rotten eggs, Jeremy thought. "You ought to take a bath once in a while," he said.

The auctioneer was trembling. "I'm terribly sorry this happened, Mr. Scratch."

"It's not your fault. The transaction is far from over." Mr. Scratch took a neat white business card from the breast pocket of the jacket he wore under his black rain-slicker, giving it to Jeremy.

Jeremy read: HARRY SCRATCH—all kinds of bargains

"You'll be hearing from me," Harry Scratch said.

"Any old time," Jeremy told him, and pocketed the card. "You're in the second-hand business, huh?"

"You might say that. Second hand souls"

"I don't get it."

"You will. You most certainly will, Mr.—"

"Smith."

"Smith, yes. I have any number of Smiths. I'm prepared to offer you five hundred dollars for that hand-bag."

"Wow!"

"Then we can make a deal?"

"I only said 'wow.'"

"Sign here," said Mr. Scratch, producing a bill of sale.

"Well, I don't know."

"Damn you I hope. A thousand."

Jeremy thought: it must be worth a small fortune. "Hell, no," he said.

"That, sir, is my province."

"And that, sir, is my answer."

Mr. Scratch placed one hand on the clasp of the bag. "You'll notice it's quite old," he said.

"Probably antique," Jeremy told him cheerfully.

"I'll give you two thousand, but that's all. I can take it, you know."

"Who do you think you're kidding, wise guy?"

Mr. Scratch held on tight to the clasp.

"Let go," said Jeremy.

"Two thousand, five hundred."

"Oh, nuts." Jeremy had in mind to try the auctioneer's trick, anyway. He opened the handbag and made a scooping motion with it up the length of Mr. Scratch's arm. Mr. Scratch's arm disappeared. The bag was open, like a large leather mouth, at Mr. Scratch's shoulder.

"Give it to me," said Mr. Scratch.

Jeremy made more scooping motions with the handbag. Mr. Scratch disappeared. Gingerly, Jeremy reached into the handbag and plucked out a tiny devilishly smiling Mr. Scratch wearing a tiny black rain-slicker. "Give it to me," Mr. Scratch said in a tiny voice, while Jeremy held him on the palm of his hand. Jeremy gaped.

"Give it to me."

"You," said Jeremy, "can go to hell." He thrust the tiny Mr. Scratch back into the handbag and closed the clasp. He thought he heard leathery, squeaking noises. He thought the noises must be in his mind. Entirely too much to drink. He turned to the audience. The audience was gone.

Meropa stood there in the center of the shop, wringing her hands. "I'm so afraid," she said.

Jeremy turned to the long-nosed proprietor. "What about the auction?" he said.

"What auction? The auction is over." The long-nosed man seemed relieved.

"It's still raining," Meropa said.

"I know. You'll melt."

"You were very foolish, but very brave. Getting the bag for me like that."

"It's not for you. For my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Dora."

Meropa gave a little laugh and opened the door. The door tinkled. Meropa stepped back inside. "I almost forgot, it's still raining."

"Come here," Jeremy said. He opened the bag and looked inside. He could see the tiny Mr. Scratch down there in his tiny rain-slicker, shaking two tiny fists and piping words he could not quite hear.

Jeremy made scooping motions at Meropa with the handbag. It seemed the thing to do, if Meropa would melt in the rain. *Gallant*.

He scooped and scooped.

Meropa disappeared.

"You," said Mrs. Dora Smith to her husband, "have been drinking."

"About that silly argument," Jeremy said. "It was all my fault."

Dora sniffed. "You always say that."

"No, really."

"Saying you're sorry isn't enough."

"I have something."

"What."

"Present for you, Dora. Here." Jeremy took the leather handbag out from behind his back and showed it to her.

"Why, Jeremy! It's beauti-

ful. It's the most beautiful handbag I've ever seen."

"It ought to be. It cost me over a hundred and thirty dollars."

"What? WHAT!"

"That's right."

"You take it right back where you got it and bring me a dozen roses or something. A hundred and thirty dollars!"

"You said you liked it."

"We can't afford it."

"I'm not going to bring it back."

"What did you say?"

"No."

"Jeremy. . . ."

"It was an auction."

"And you really can't return it?"

"That's right."

Dora stroked the soft leather lovingly. "Well, I suppose in that case it would be all right if I used it on special occasions. Don't you think it would look beautiful with my new black dress?"

"Yes," said Jeremy.

Dora fondled the handbag. "What's inside?"

"Nothing."

"No mirror or compartments or anything?"

"Absolutely nothing. Don't open it."

"You've got to open a handbag to use it."

"Not this handbag."

"What's the matter with you, Jeremy?"

He took the handbag away from her. He was sober now. He didn't know why he had given her the handbag. He had to do something about Harry Scratch. The devilishly smiling man in the black rain-slicker would be furious. What did you do, let him out and hope he'd go away? Make some kind of bargain with him if you promised to let him out? Drop the leather handbag, Harry Scratch and all, into the apartment house incinerator chute? No, Harry Scratch wouldn't mind *that*.

"Something smells in here," Dora said. "Something is burning."

"It must be from the incinerator chute, dear." The incinerator was right down the hall from their apartment.

But that wasn't it. Jeremy could smell it too now. Like rotten eggs. He thought he saw a thin wisp of smoke coming from the handbag, but it must have been his imagination because Dora said nothing about it.

"I still smell something burning, Jeremy."

Desperately, he reached into the handbag and wrapped his fingers gently about the small figure inside. He pluck-

ed it out and placed it on the table.

He yowled.

He'd forgotten about Meropa.

It was Meropa he'd plucked from the bag. She sat on the kitchen table, swinging her legs and smiling at him. She was very lovely and made Dora, a very ordinary young woman with plain hair and one of those you-see-them-all-the-time-in-a-crowd faces and an angular figure, seem even plainer.

"Who," said Dora, "is she? Where did she come from?"

"Oh," said Jeremy.

"I'm Meropa. I was here all the time."

"Of course she was here all the time," said Jeremy, gaining courage. "I was waiting for you to say something."

"She just came in, Jeremy Smith."

"Try the door. It's locked. How could she just come in, sitting on the table?"

"And tell her to get off my table."

Meropa, who of course had attained her full size as soon as Jeremy plucked her from the handbag, vaulted lithely to the floor. "I'm Jeremy's cousin Meropa from Jersey City," she said.

"Cousin Meropa," said

Jeremy, "I want you to meet Dora."

"He's nice," Meropa whispered to Jeremy. "You'd be surprised, but he's quite nice."

"Who's nice?"

Meropa blushed faintly. "Why, Mr. Scratch."

"What are you two saying?" Dora asked.

"We weren't saying anything, dear."

"I heard you whispering. I don't believe this girl is really your cousin. So this is the present you bought me? It's probably *her* pocket-book."

"No. Honest."

"I don't think I like her," Meropa said.

"You shut up!" And Jeremy scooped desperately at Meropa with the handbag before she could get away.

She managed to say, "I'm warning you. Mr. Scratch wants out." Then she disappeared.

"Where's your cousin Meropa?" Dora asked Jeremy, looking under the table.

"My cousin who?"

"Your cousin Meropa from Jersey City."

"I don't have any cousin Meropa from Jersey City."

"The girl who was just here!"

"What girl who was just here, dear?"

Dora looked in the living

room and the bedroom, then tried the door, which was locked from the inside. "You mean, there wasn't any girl?"

"No, dear."

"Jeremy, I . . . Jeremy, I need a drink I think."

Jeremy grinned and led the way to the portable bar in the living room. It would settle one problem, at least temporarily. Dora became pleasantly, sleepily high. Jeremy soon had her tucked away safely in bed. The handbag still smelled, but faintly. After what had happened with Meropa, Jeremy wouldn't have the nerve to try plucking one of them—or both of them—out again. He undressed, got into his pajamas and climbed into bed. He was suddenly very sleepy. In the morning he would worry about Mr. Scratch and Meropa, or possibly awake to find it was all an incredible, impossible, fantastic dream.

There was a draft from somewhere. Picking up the covers and blowing them and making Jeremy's legs cold. He blinked and opened his eyes.

He shut them again.

He heard voices. It was real. It was happening.

"He's getting up now, but the dame's still asleep."

"What a stunt! What will

these furniture companies think of next?"

"If they ain't got a license, they'd better think of something pretty good next."

That last voice sounded like Law. Jeremy opened his eyes again.

Nothing had changed.

He and Dora were in a double bed. Their double bed. But the apartment was gone. The house was gone, all six floors and sixty apartments of it. The bed, in which he had been sleeping with Dora, was resting on a vacant lot between two other apartment houses. You could tell it was still very early in the morning by how cool it was, but a big crowd had gathered and was surrounding the bed five and six deep. Directly in front of Jeremy stood a large, probably Irish and probably angry, policeman.

At the foot of the bed was the leather handbag.

Jeremy sat up, clutching the covers about him with one hand and reaching for the leather bag with the other. He looked inside. He shuddered.

Inside the handbag was a small, rectangular, scale model of an apartment house. Their apartment house. Apparently this was Mr. Scratch's way of getting even.

"What's going on here?" said the policeman.

"Nothing. Nothing at all, officer."

"You call this nothing at all?"

Dora woke up, opened her eyes, screamed, and dove under the covers again.

"I can explain everything, officer."

"I'm listening. What are you, gypsies or something? How did you get that bed here in this lot? Is this a publicity stunt for some new furniture company?"

"I can explain everything."

"What have you got there in your hand?"

"It looks like a pocket-book," said Jeremy.

"Yours?"

"I never saw it before in my life." This, Jeremy thought happily, was one way to get rid of Mr. Scratch.

"It's mine," someone in the crowd said. Jeremy looked. The face was familiar.

It belonged to Mr. Perseus.

"Then take it," said the policeman, and gave the handbag to Mr. Perseus.

"Wait a minute!" Jeremy cried. What's the matter with me, he thought. If Perseus takes that now, I'll never be able to explain things. And anyway, what would happen to the sixty microscopic fami-



lies living in the sixty tiny apartments inside the leather bag?

"What is it now?" asked the policeman.

"That bag belongs to us. I gave it to my wife yesterday. Ask her." Jeremy shook his wife's shoulder under the covers.

"Jeremy, I was having the strangest dream," everyone heard her muffled voice.

Jeremy snatched the handbag from Mr. Perseus, unmindful of everyone staring at him in his silk pajamas. Jeremy shoved the handbag under the covers. "This yours, dear?"

"Yes, dear."

"It's mine," Mr. Perseus insisted.

"Well, now," said the policeman, "I don't know. And sure it's a peculiar handbag, anyhow. Kind of large, don't you think? Maybe one of you gentlemen can be telling me what's inside." He stared severely at Jeremy. "But don't be getting any ideas. Either way, it's down to the station house with you."

"It's empty," said Mr. Perseus. "Absolutely empty."

"There's a small scale model of an apartment house inside," Jeremy told the policeman. "And, uh, maybe two

small human statues. Mechanical toys, you know."

The policeman took the handbag and peered inside. He pushed back his visored cap and scratched his head. "Well, now. The peculiar gentleman in the pajamas seems to be right," he said. He jerked a thumb at Mr. Perseus. "If I were you, my man, I would be thinking of leaving this place before *you* get asked a few questions."

Mr. Perseus grumbled and disappeared into the crowd.

At that moment, the sound of a siren was heard and a large green police patrol wagon drew up to the curb behind the green and white police car. The big Irish policeman clasped the handbag and said, "You and your wife will be driving down in the paddy wagon to the station house. I'll be meeting you there with this evidence."

"Evidence of what?" Jeremy asked.

"Sure, and I don't know yet. Get a move on."

Two policemen came from the back of the patrol wagon and headed ominously for the double bed in the middle of the vacant lot. Jeremy shuddered. If they were separated from the handbag, anything might happen.

The Irish policeman was al-

ready moving off toward the green and white police car. Jeremy took a deep breath, sprang off the bed, and ran after the policeman.

Jeremy hurled himself through the air and brought down the Irish policeman in as pretty a tackle as this crowd or any crowd ever saw.

The Irish Policeman holered for St. Patrick.

Jeremy clawed at the handbag and ripped it open, pulling out the small scale model of their apartment house and setting it down on the bare earth of the lot.

"You'll have to answer to the sergeant for that too!"

But the scale model of the apartment house grew.

And grew.

Jeremy sat on the bed, still clutching the handbag. About him were the walls of their bedroom. Dora, bless her, had fallen asleep again. Gingerly, Jeremy reached into the handbag and plucked out first the tiny figures of Meropa and Harry Scratch.

"Thank you," said the full-sized Mr. Scratch.

"You're not angry?"

"For locking me up in there, yes. For this—" Mr. Scratch patted Meropa's sleek shoulder—"no. Now I owe you a favor, young man."

Jeremy didn't get it. A favor. He looked at the gorgeous Meropa and then at the plain Dora, still sleeping in their bed. He then looked mutely at Mr. Scratch.

When next he turned to Dora, she was beautiful. More beautiful even than Meropa.

"Thank you," Jeremy said tremulously. Dora would be delighted. He would be delighted. But—why?

"I was growing tired of Persephone anyway," admitted Mr. Scratch. "Thank you very much."

"You're welcome," Jeremy said.

"Don't you see?" Meropa asked him.

"Well, no."

Mr. Scratch took Meropa's hand in his and tucked the handbag under his other arm, wrapping the black rain-slicker about himself like a cloak. "Come, my dear," he said. Then, to Jeremy, "You don't mind about the bag?"

"Hell, no. Excuse me. I wouldn't know what to do with it."

Meropa winked at Jeremy as she walked out into the hall with Mr. Scratch. "We," she said, "are going to have a baby."

The door closed softly behind them, just as the beautiful Dora awoke. **THE END**



## *never let the left hand . . .*

By W. NICHOLAS EARL

*The following is printed as a public service. The manuscript, with no return address, was mailed from a local Post Office near our office, and efforts to trace it further have failed. Do you know a W. (Bill?) Nicholas Earl? Do you know a man named George who died as described? Do you know the intersection described? If so, act immediately.—THE EDITORS.*

The change in my friend George haunted me for the short time until his death—and now haunts me even more. "I should have done something," I keep telling myself. "I could have saved him." But what could I do? How could I have guessed? "The thing was so strange there really was no chance to know." So I keep saying.

The last time I saw George I saw the change. He was tired and drawn; that was obvious, but he often worked hard and showed it. His voice was curiously flat—at least, I know now that it was, though I am not sure I noticed then. He avoided my questions about his fiancée, though he usually spoke so warmly of her. But it was not any of these things that

haunted me. It was not any particular change, but rather a subtle total change that haunted me.

Now that I know what had happened to George I sometimes tell myself . . . myself, or is it myself . . . I say that I should have noticed certain things. His eyes, for instance. How would you feel, looking into an old friend's eyes and momentarily thinking he is cross-eyed? Or is he cock-eyed? And not knowing which, and realizing at the same time that he was not either cross-eyed or cock-eyed and never had been. Would you have known?

I keep telling me I should have known from his eyes. But I only had the vague thought that I must be cross-eyed or wall-eyed, and this is how people feel when you look at the wrong eye.

If George had been physically ill I would have known and could have done something. Or if he had been on the edge of a nervous collapse, or been mentally ill, I think I could have told myself . . . I mean, I would have known.

Would you have known? For instance, just as you met George and shook his left hand: Would you have jumped to the conclusion he had hurt his right hand? Or would you both have said to each other . . . I mean, would you have known the awful thing that happened to him?

This is very hard for me to left . . . to write. I get confused and keep saying what I tell myself the wrong things. But you can tell yourself from George's diary. It was in his desk when he died. Here is the revealing part of the diary:

JANUARY 16

The vital need in the world today is brains, for man's science has run away with man's intelligence. The men of highest human intelligence are as helpless before man's self-created problems as any of the rest of us. We need more than human intelligence. We need *brains*—brains that are as much greater than man's as his are greater than an apes and the animals he dominates.

And the pity of it! Half of all human brains are wasted, because only one of the two frontal lobes is used. A crowbar may be driven through a man's subservient lobe without damaging his mind. The dominant frontal lobe—only the left

half of the brain in right-handed people—is the seat of the mind and even controls the *left* hand.

JANUARY 17

It is curious that today I read of the reeducation of soldiers who lost their dominant lobe in war—curious that should have come up just after I was thinking of the waste of the subservient lobe. Modern medicine can save a man whose brain is damaged, even the dominant lobe, though he is left more vegetable than man. But now modern psychology has learned to contact, and modern methods of education to teach, the remaining subservient lobe. Vegetable can be man again. *If this is true, is it not possible—even probable—that a man be twice a man?*

JANUARY 23

It can be done. I am sure it can be done. So little has been written on the subject, even in the Library of Congress, that I have been able to read it and get back home in less than a week. But there was enough. I am sure I can do it.

Dearest, it was so good to see you again today. If you love me now, how much will you love me twice over?

JANUARY 24

The theory of approach in the sound human being would be basically the same as that of an approach to an individual whose dominant lobe is disabled. It is a problem of approach, awakening, and then of education, and the only real difference in the sound human being would be the presence of an active dominant lobe. I do not know whether this will be a help or hindrance. The presence of an active dominant lobe might well cause such interference as to make an approach to the subservient lobe impossible. On the other hand, if an approach should be possible, would not the existence of an active and indeed controlling mind eliminate some of the difficulty that is actually experienced in the effort to approach the vegetative patient?

My efforts to use a purely mental approach are getting nowhere: I find that the interference factor is the controlling one, at least at the beginning. There seems no way to avoid the dominating activity of the dominant lobe. I believe an approach to the subservient lobe may one day be worked out while the dominant lobe is asleep, but I can't find it. The use of drugs would affect both.

It appears, then, that a physical rather than a mental attack on the problem is necessary at this stage. In other words, there must be dormant nerve channels from the left side to the subservient right lobe, and if it can be awakened to activity through these means, it will only mean a change in order—that is awakening, approach, and teaching instead of approach, awakening, and teaching. My notebooks addressed exclusively to this problem are filling rapidly, but all is negative so far.

## FEBRUARY 17

Using the techniques described in my notebooks, I am becoming ambidextrous. Progress is much faster than I could have dreamed.

I can now write with both hands at once. There is contact. I can't tell when the light will come, when the sleeper will awake. Will it be when there is evidence of independent thought? I know it will be soon; I am sure, I sense with my whole self, that it will be very soon indeed. What power I will have! I have not yet said

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anything about this experiment to my love. We must succeed, I will succeed, and that will be time enough.

On reading yesterday's sample of ambidextrous writing I see I wrote of power. I have rarely in my life before wanted power. The possibility of having power within my grasp is a little intoxicating. But after all it is not really basically what I want. I want only to contribute, to acquire otherwise only what I need to survive. "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." But I am sure I have the courage to resist this corrupting intoxicant. Indeed I must have, else my effort to contribute is lost.

It would be curious indeed if the subservient lobe, once awakened, retained some independence. The result might be like "split-personality," like schizophrenia. But, of course, there would be the basic difference that the schizoid or schizophrenic personality is a sick one, the dynamics entirely different. In fact, even if the newly awakened mind were to some extent independent, the new mind of the subservient lobe would be most sane, most sound, for it would surely lack the childhood background that results in the bad integration of the schizoid mind.

Anyway I must give it a certain independence at first to awaken it. This is a minor chance I have to take, for it seems that the very dominance of the other lobe is what has kept it subservient and lifeless. I am sure there is no danger.

And I seem to have made progress toward the early stage of independence. Even since yesterday ambidexterity has improved to the point that my left hand can write backwards. I progress so fast that it surprises and delights me.

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FEBRUARY 19

I have been working so hard I stupidly realize that you haven't seen your drooling goat for more than a

I have been working so hard I suddenly realize that I haven't seen my darling girl for more than a week. But

weakling. But you do have a dinner date tonight, and I am going to have some fun. (You stay out of my side from now on, see.)

It will indeed.

Don't you wish you knew? You got it back, didn't you? Of course, you don't know what made her send it back.

Like fun you came home early! What "you" did to her shouldn't happen to a dog. I wouldn't have her.

Said! It's what you did, boy.

I'll take a look at Bill. He might do better than you.

Oh, stop blubbering. I don't need you any longer, you know.

I know everything you know, in fact everything you ever knew. You forget, you and your resistances. But everything you ever knew, even for a moment, was recorded there for me to know. I will say, in spite of what you forgot, you had known a great deal. Intellectual, you thought you were, Egghead. You're the first egghead with a double yolk.

Well, there are a lot more with plenty of room. I'll take a look at this Bill character. He might be quite a relief compared to this thing.

we do have a dinner date tonight, and I will be glad to relax. I really need a rest.

It will be good.

## FEBRUARY 20

God, oh God, what have I done! A telegraph boy brought back my ring, and no message. What could have happened to us?

I came home early. We had dinner, and I was so tired I came home early—I am sure I came home early.

Was it something I said to her?

I have got to see Bill. Oh, God, please let Bill help me.



So I saw Bill, and he saw me, and was he surprised. I think he was disturbed by the eyes more than anything else. George here was right handed and, of course, right eyed. So Bill got feeling real weird when I turned up left eyed. But he couldn't figure it out.

Anyway, he'll do. So I will dispose of this thing. I say, George old bean, how about a few last

words. It's being done, you know.

Now is that any way to carry on? I really wouldn't

Oh, Lord, forgive me. Oh, help me, help me, help me

have thought it of you, George. Always blubbing—So cut it now. I'll do something about those notebooks, and then we'll go for a little drive along the river.

\* \* \* \* \*

That was the last entry. On the same day, February 21, George was driving on the River Road. At the top of the bluff a driver behind him saw him signal a right turn at County Highway 413. But he turned left and plunged into thirty feet of icy water.

**THE END**

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# BATTLEGROUND

By WILLIAM MORRISON

*Snatching an appendix neatly and efficiently was Doctor Verner's dish, so the operation appeared to be entirely routine. But this particular patient was constructed along strange lines. He needed his appendix very badly!*

IF VERNER hadn't been a butcher as well as a skilled surgeon, thought Dr. George Larkin some time later, the strange appendix would never have come to light. And if he hadn't been a butcher, Larkin might have added, Verner would have lived longer. But that fact neither man had any way of knowing at the beginning.

There had been a shortage of operable patients that day, in both wards and private rooms, and Dr. Verner's fingers were itching to remain in practice. And the black-haired white-faced man the nurse had just wheeled in was made to order for a diagnosis of appendicitis.

"Temperature?" asked Dr. Verner.

"One hundred four point

eight," said Martha Johnson, a newly graduated nurse who aroused Dr. Verner's less surgical instincts, and made him regret her own lack of interest in him.

Verner grunted with satisfaction. "Blood count?"

Miss Johnson handed him the result of a test, and he nodded happily. The white corpuscle count was extraordinarily high. This had all the earmarks of a severe case.

But if Verner was a butcher, he was a careful one. He had already examined the man once. Now his hands moved again over the almost unconscious man's abdomen, pressing a little more roughly than was necessary. The man groaned, and once more Verner grunted happily. The abdomen was stiff as a board,



It was a strange way to kick a man in the brain.

and must have been as painful as a giant boil.

"We'd better operate at once," decided Verner. "How about a release?"

Miss Johnson hesitated. "I'm afraid there's a little trouble there," she admitted. "He collapsed in the street, and was brought here in an ambulance. We don't know his name."

"No papers on him?" demanded Verner incredulously.

"No, Doctor."

"I won't operate without a release," said the surgeon, his manner suddenly righteous. "I've been accused too often as it is of cutting out perfectly healthy organs."

"Of course, Doctor," said Miss Johnson soothingly.

The man on the table stirred. His eyes remained closed, but his lips could still form words. "Peter James," he muttered thickly.

"You're Peter James?" asked Verner.

A nod answered him.

"You need an emergency operation for appendicitis, but I can't help you unless you're willing to sign a paper releasing the hospital from responsibility if anything goes wrong. If you don't sign, and I don't operate, you'll be finished. Will you sign?"

The patient muttered some-

thing that might have passed for, "Yes."

A sheet of paper was thrust before him, and Miss Johnson's arm supported his shoulder as his hand weakly grasped the pen. He signed.

Dr. Verner sighed, and went to work.

Dr. Verner could have snatched an appendix in the dark, and very often did, making as short an incision as he could get away with, and letting his fingers do the work with almost no aid from his eyes. This time he hardly noted the shape of the organ he removed—he had seen so many of them, of all shapes and sizes, that he paid little attention any more, except to check on whether or not they were inflamed. This one was. That was all he wanted to know, and he went on to the next patient.

Miss Johnson, on the other hand, had seen very few appendices. She was impressed by the shape of this one, and instead of tossing it out, kept it in a bottle to show Dr. Larkin when the latter made his rounds. Dr. Larkin was only a few years out of medical school, and he still believed that he might be not only a physician, but a scientist as well. It was a delusion that

the hospital had not yet been able to discourage.

He stared at the excised organ and said, "That's no appendix. Too short and thick."

"They come that way sometimes. Dr. Verner said so."

If Dr. Verner said so, the ethics of his profession permitted no contradiction on his part. They also permitted him no opportunity to examine a patient under the care of another physician, unless that physician or the patient himself requested his care. And this patient was in no condition to request anything.

But there were ways of getting around that. He sought Verner, as if casually, and said with a respect he didn't feel, "Hello, Doctor, how's the golf game these days?"

"Good," returned Verner, who prided himself on his athletic ability. "It could be better, though, if I had more chance to practice."

"Looks like a nice day for playing."

"I have these patients—Doctor, would you do me a favor and keep an eye on them for the afternoon?"

That was what Larkin had been fishing for, and he assented heartily. A few moments later, he was examin-

ing the appendicitis victim, who had come out of the ether, and was now sleeping peacefully.

"Temperature down, white count very low, abdomen relaxed—he hardly seems sick."

"Dr. Verner operated just in time," said Miss Johnson.

"Or else," thought Larkin, "no operation was necessary." He said aloud, "Let me have that appendix."

Miss Johnson handed it over, and he sectioned off a thin slice, which he examined under the microscope. He turned pale at what he saw, and sliced off another sample of tissue.

"What is it, George?" He looked at Miss Johnson, and she colored. "I mean, what is it, Doctor?"

He hadn't even noticed that she thought of him as, "George." His face was shining with perspiration, while his eyes stared unhappily at her. He muttered, "It's a joke of some kind."

"What's that, Doctor?"

"I said that Dr. Verner's trying to play a joke on you. Do you know what's in this so-called appendix? Gray matter. The same stuff you'll find in the brain, with the same convolutions and the same general structure. This thing was no appendix."

"But I saw Dr. Verner take it out himself, Dr. Larkin!"

"You'll swear to that?"

"Of course I will," she said indignantly. "Besides, how could it be a joke? Is any part of the human brain shaped like that?"

Larkin's eyes narrowed. "You're right, it isn't. Nor is any animal brain that I know of. Miss Johnson, I think that this man had better have a few X-rays."

Later, when they had the plates and examined them together, Larkin seemed sicker than the patient. "It's hard to believe," he muttered at last. "Peter James has two extra ribs and an extra stomach. His heart's on the wrong side. He lacks kidneys and gall bladder—and no human being can live without at least one kidney, or live in very good health without a gall bladder. He has a regulation skull, and one fairly normal brain. But he seems to have had an extra brain in his abdomen. In addition, the bones in his arms and legs make liars out of all my professors of anatomy. Miss Johnson, no matter what this man looks like, he isn't human."

"Then what is he?"

"I don't know. He can pass

himself off as human, and no one would have noticed the difference if Verner hadn't been so crazy about operating. He probably had some disease peculiar to his own type, and it simulated the symptoms of appendicitis. Obviously, the symptoms would have passed away if there had been no operation. Cutting him open just delayed his recovery."

"I wonder," said Miss Johnson, turning a little pale on her own account.

"You wonder what?"

"Whether there are any more like him around. And if they are, what they're doing here."

They were silent for a moment. At last, Larkin admitted, "I was wondering the same thing, Martha, but I didn't like to put it in words. I'd like to observe this patient."

"Certainly, Doctor. Incidentally, do you usually think of me as, 'Martha'?"

Dr. Larkin flushed. "It's a bad habit I find myself slipping into, Miss Johnson. I'll try to cure it."

"Don't bother," she advised. "Try to be like the other doctors—so busy watching the patients that they haven't time to care about curing themselves."

"The patients and the nurses."

"Just the patients and this one nurse," she said firmly.

It turned out to be just one patient, at that. The physical recovery of Peter James was completely uneventful, but his mental reactions offered features of interest. He seemed to be alert enough when Larkin chatted casually about the weather that day, or about the terrible state of the world, but his face showed confusion when the conversation turned to himself. He remembered his name and the place he lived, but little more. He spoke as if his previous existence had been a dream, and he didn't know what he did for a living, or what had happened before he had his attack of illness.

They checked at the address he gave. He had hired a room the very day he was taken to the hospital, but he had not yet brought his baggage along, and the landlady knew nothing about him, except that he had enough money to pay for two weeks' rent in advance.

"For a human being, it would be a strange form of amnesia," observed Larkin. "Amnesia victims usually have a subconscious anxiety

to get out of themselves, to shake off their previous identities, and as a result, their names and addresses are usually the first things they forget. But for a non-human creature who's had some brain matter removed, it would be a perfectly logical reaction."

"If he isn't human, then Peter James can't be his real name."

"Right, Martha, I think it's time we found out whether or not there are any more like him walking around."

"How? X-ray every one in town?"

"Not quite. Just every one, say, in the B. & L. Steel Co., as a fair sample."

"The B. & L. Company employs ten thousand people."

"With the new mass X-ray system, we can snap a shot quickly for less than a cent per film. And as every B. & L. employee, from the president on down, punches a time clock when checking in, we can label every film with the right number, and identify any non-human individual we find."

"It doesn't sound like an easy job," she said doubtfully.

"All we need is cooperation from the right B. & L. official. We can arrange to have them automatically snap them-

selves as they punch the clock. The only thing I'm uncertain about is the official to go to. Suppose the one we picked was a creature like Peter James?"

"Dawson Hartnell, the Treasurer, isn't."

"How do you know?"

"He was at the hospital last month—one of Dr. Goldsmith's patients. And I remember that he was X-rayed. He wouldn't have taken a chance if he weren't human."

"Good, Martha, I'll try him."

Dawson Hartnell, a paunchy official who had served as treasurer for so many years that he thought of everything in terms of slashed budgets, was at first doubtful. But Larkin spoke convincingly. He was conducting a research survey on industrial workers, at his own expense. The results were for his own use, and the name of the company would not be published. If he came across any cases that showed dangerous illness, he would turn the names over to the company, so that treatment might catch the disease at an early stage, and save the company money in compensation insurance. As he presented it, the company had nothing to lose and something very definite to gain.

Eventually, Dawson Hartnell shrugged. He wanted to be assured that the whole thing would be kept secret, for the men, and more especially the officials, of the company would have resented being examined without their knowledge. Larkin was only too glad to give him the necessary assurances, and even gladder that he himself hadn't been forced to suggest it. Secrecy was essential

He set up his apparatus at the main gate one night after the men had checked out. The plant was working only a single shift, and the few guards who were about had no opportunity to find out what he was doing. The next day's X-rays brought no results, and he shifted the apparatus to another time-clock and then to still another. By the end of the week, he had spotted several cases in need of treatment, but not a single skeleton that wasn't human.

The Q. & Z. Body Parts Corporation was next on the list, and here, operating with the aid of the President himself, Larkin had better luck. One X-ray out of the five thousand showed a non-human skeleton. The man who possessed it was Ernest Littlefield, one of the Vice



Presidents. Littlefield was in his thirties, a suave sharp-featured man whose black hair and pale face reminded Larkin of Peter James himself. His rise in the company had been rapid, and it was generally agreed that he would go very far indeed.

Larkin studied the X-ray photograph and said gloomily, "Well, we've found one, and there are probably others around. What do we do next?"

"Get the police," suggested Miss Johnson.

"Why? So far as we know, Littlefield hasn't committed any crime. There's no law against having an extra stomach, or lacking a gall bladder."

"There's nothing else *we* can do," pointed out Miss Johnson logically. "The police might think of something."

"They might think of having us committed for observation," he returned. "What we have to do is find out what Littlefield and James, and any others like them, are up to. Where did they come from, and why are they here? And just what is the function of that extra, abdominal brain?"

"If only Dr. Verner hadn't operated on James, we'd be able to see for ourselves."

"If he hadn't operated,

James wouldn't have stayed here. We'll try asking him again anyway. Perhaps if we suggest different possibilities to him, we may be able to strike a familiar chord, and a few things."

The patient was ready to leave his bed now. He was, in fact, almost ready to leave the hospital. Larkin knew that fast action would be needed, and he was relieved to find that Verner was not around to interfere.

Larkin began casually. "Do you remember the name you had in those dreams of yours, Mr. James?"

"Peter. Peter James."

"Not that. The one you used on your home planet."

James looked puzzled. "Did I say that I had come from a different planet?"

"You came from one in your dreams, didn't you?"

"I remember vaguely—there were instructions—"

"Now you're getting it! What were your instructions?"

"I think I remember." He looked coldly at Larkin. "The chief thing was—under no circumstances to talk about them."

Larkin laughed, as if they were cosily sharing a secret. "It's nonsense to take a dream *that* seriously. What else?"

"I'm not supposed to talk.

"How many were in the group that was sent here?"

"I'm not supposed to talk."

Larkin began to perspire. "You'll never stop having these dreams until you get them out of your system. It's a therapeutic measure."

"No, you can't fool me. They aren't dreams. I remember now—" He stopped talking abruptly.

Larkin exchanged glances with Miss Johnson. The man's memory was coming back, partly because of their prodding. And that meant that many of the strange powers that were connected with his peculiar nervous and anatomical system might also come back. If that happened, and James suspected what they were doing, before they had obtained any useful information, it might be a sad story both for them and for the rest of humanity.

Larkin rose, and forced a smile. "If you don't want to talk, no one will make you. Come along, Miss Johnson."

Outside the room, he asked, "Does he receive any medication?"

The nurse shook her head.

"Then I'll have to prescribe some. Do you think, Martha, that you can get a shot of

scopolamine into him without arousing his suspicions?"

"I'll manage. But Dr. Verner will be angry."

"Verner won't be around tonight until fairly late. And he won't know. If James were a human being, I could be accused of behaving unethically, but he isn't, and under the circumstances, I think I'm justified."

"I think so too, George. I'll give it to him."

Larkin was near sweating blood while she went into the patient's room and he kept an eye on the corridor outside. But she came out a moment later, and nodded, and said, "No trouble at all. I told him it would help his recovery."

"Good girl, Martha. Now you'd better take over out here, stay on guard while I question him."

"But I want to hear what he has to say. And I can take shorthand notes."

"Not a bad idea. Come on."

The man's breathing was heavy and labored, and Larkin wondered how his non-human physiology would react later to the dose of drug. But the mental reactions were the important thing now, and he had no time to waste before learning what they were. He demanded, "Your name."

"I cannot tell."

Larkin's heart sank. Even the so-called truth serum hadn't been able to overcome the stranger's inhibitions on that score. But he professed a confidence he didn't feel, and went on.

"Your task?"

The answer came monotonously, "I cannot tell."

"Your destination?"

This time a positive answer came, though slowly and almost incomprehensibly. "Xanl."

"Repeat that in your new language."

"Earth."

There seemed to be no inhibitions in telling what his enemies were already supposed to know, and that might be important. Larkin asked, "For whom must you watch out?"

"For the Narians."

"Are they of Earth?"

"No. From the outer planets."

Larkin was encountering no inhibitions now, and he pressed his advantage. "Is it possible to win over the Earth people as allies?"

"Silly."

"Why is it silly?"

"Too inferior. Worthless one way or the other."

Larkin mopped his brow

at that one. He said, "Are the Narians inferior too?"

"In some ways. But they are a difficult foe to conquer."

"If the Narians come from the outer planets, why are you here?"

"I cannot tell."

They were back to that again. Larkin, "Do you come from one of the inner planets?"

"I cannot tell."

"That probably means that you do. What is your purpose here? To see if the Narians are setting up bases?"

There was silence.

"To set up your own bases?"

Silence again.

"If the Earth people are worthless, why were you instructed to maintain silence among them?"

Unexpectedly, the answer came. "So that the Narians might not learn."

"Then there are Narian spies here too?"

No answer. Larkin asked a loaded question: "What do they look like?"

"Earth creatures, if here."

The thought that the Narians might be on Earth too was a little too much for him. Not one alien form, but two, had invaded Earth. And neither of them regarded the planet's inhabitants highly.

"Suppose you and the Narians clash here. What will happen to the people of Earth?"

The stranger's eyes closed. Larkin turned toward Martha, and said, "He doesn't really have to answer that one. We can guess readily enough. We're considered too worthless to worry about. No matter which one's group is trying to establish bases here, the Earth, which has been temporarily neutral territory, will be turned into a battleground. They'll really do their fighting here, and wipe us out without compunction."

"But what can we do, George?"

"Somehow or other, we'll have to let the police or government know. We'll have to think of a way of approaching them so that they won't consider us crazy." He pondered for a moment. "The executive board is having a budgetary conference here tonight, and Dr. Martingale will be present. He's respectable and important enough. The police should take his word, especially if it's backed up by the word of his committee."

"And how do we convince Dr. Martingale?"

"Do this. Bring him the

X-ray plate we made of James. Don't tell him how we got it, but indicate that it was made by mistake. Let Martingale see that you're greatly disturbed—as you must be to come barging right into the middle of his committee meeting. Show him the plate without doing much talking. The best thing would be to gasp, and just point to it. If those extra ribs and stomach don't arouse his interest as a surgeon, I'll eat the thing."

"He'll say it's a mistake. He'll laugh at me in front of all those people."

"Of course he will. But in doing that, he'll call *their* attention to it. Then you can tell him that there isn't any mistake, because this is a duplicate plate, and it checks with the first one. If I know Martingale, he'll want to put an end to your nonsense by having another plate made under his own supervision. Once he examines James himself, we'll have him sold."

"All right, George, I'll do it."

"I'll stay here with James. Maybe I can get something else out of him after all."

He kissed her before she went, and Martha Johnson said blushing, "Don't, I

have to keep my mind on what I'm going to tell them."

Then she was gone, and Larkin turned back once more to the heavily breathing stranger on the bed. But this time none of his questions received an answer. The stranger's eyes remained closed, and he showed no interest in anything Larkin said.

Larkin leaned back in his chair and nervously lit a cigarette. There were a great many aspects of the case that worried him—what Verner would do when he learned that a colleague had distrusted his diagnosis of appendicitis, what James would do as his mental faculties returned, what the alien visitors would do when they realized that the people of Earth were aware of their presence and were instituting a mass hunt for them.

There was one thing that he failed to wonder about, and that was what Ernest Littlefield would do when he opened the door and walked quietly into the hospital room.

Larkin started to leap to his feet, but he wasn't out of his chair before the other man was next to him, moving so fast that Larkin's eyes caught only a confused blur.

A hand hit Larkin carelessly in the chest and knocked him back into the chair again.

"Don't try to get up," said Littlefield pleasantly. "Our reflexes are much more rapid than yours. I don't often have a chance to show them, but I think you could stand watching a demonstration."

He stared curiously at the man in the bed. Larkin said nervously, "He's been operated on. Appendix removed. Not by me."

"I wondered what had happened." Littlefield turned his back to Larkin, and bent over the patient. He spoke softly, making sounds that were unfamiliar to the physician, and the sick man's eyes opened.

Larkin stood up, as he thought, soundlessly, and took a step toward the door. This time Littlefield was not so gentle in knocking him down. He said, "I told you that I can move more rapidly than you can. You'd better believe me." And he added, casually, "You made enough noise to wake the dead. It may interest you to know that I have several senses that you lack. That's how I realized what you were doing at the plant. I can see by X-rays. And when I saw them aimed at me, I took the trouble to investigate."

Larkin was silent, as Littlefield turned back to the man on the bed. Of course, he thought, he might have known that the man could move faster. With a second brain to control the different lower body reflexes, the neural impulses to and from the leg muscles, for instance, would have half the distance to travel as in a human being. No wonder the alien could start into motion so suddenly. If that second brain were out of the way—

Larkin shook his head and shuddered as he suppressed the thought. Littlefield had said that he possessed senses which human beings lacked. He wondered if telepathy were among them.

But Littlefield gave no sign of being interested in reading his mind. He was questioning the man on the bed, and after a time James sat up and began to dress in clothes that had been hanging in a closet.

Littlefield said, "There was a nurse with you when you set up those X-ray machines. How many others know?"

Larkin's heart leaped. So they *couldn't* read minds. In that case he might be able to fool Littlefield into thinking that the police were already warned. For the question was obviously one of life and

death. If the secret belonged only to Larkin and one nurse, then it could be preserved by getting rid of those two individuals. If he could convince Littlefield—

Littlefield smile. "You can't. We don't read minds, but we know you humans well, and we can read expressions. I'm sorry. We have no more moral compunctions about killing you than you have in killing your cousins, the apes, but we don't destroy wantonly. So we'd like to limit the deaths to two. You have already inconvenienced us. We can afford no more interference."

And then, unexpectedly, the interference came. The door opened, and Dr. Verner stared at them. He demanded, with an expression of outrage, "What the devil is this fellow doing with my patient?"

Littlefield's reflexes were a marvel of speed. He had a tiny object in his hand and had pointed it at Verner before the latter had so much as realized that his life was in danger. The surgeon's expression had no chance to change before he sank to the floor.

Larkin had been using that limited human brain of his which the other fortunately couldn't read. Even as Little-

field killed the intruder, the young physician's foot caught the stranger in the abdomen, directly over the appendix-like brain.

The look of surprise on Littlefield's face was something to see. His legs seemed paralyzed under him, and the deadly little instrument he had been holding fell from his hands. Larkin picked it up, and almost at the same time grabbed a roll of adhesive tape. He taped Littlefield's hands to his sides and his feet to each other. He said grimly, "I'll admit that my own reflexes are nothing like yours, but for a human being's, they're not bad. And fortunately, I don't have my brains exposed to kicks in the stomach."

Littlefield shook his head ruefully.

"This is the first time I've been surprised by a human."

"It may not be the last. Miss Johnson, the nurse who was with me, has informed several people of your friend's anatomical peculiarities. The news may already have been relayed to the police. We may expect a delegation presently, and I think that they'll be pleased to find an extra specimen to investigate, with

second brain intact, and conveniently at hand."

"So it's useless to try to preserve secrecy."

"Yes, your killing of Verner didn't do you any good. And it may supply us with additional information. I don't know what effect your weapon had on him, but the autopsy should be interesting."

This time Littlefield seemed to mutter to himself in his own strange language. He caught Larkin looking at him, and said, "Sorry, I'm not being very polite. We have a proverb—yes, even in as advanced a civilization as ours, we still remember proverbs—to the effect that a levron—that's a strange animal something like a cross between a wolf and a seal—a levron does not querex—that is, look behind—for fear of vremon—learning the truth."

There were sarcastic overtones to the long-winded explanation, and suddenly Larkin sensed why. But it was too late to follow the suggestion of the words and look behind him. A blow smashed down on his head, and with it came blackness.

When he awoke, there was a pounding in his eardrums. After a while, he realized that it came from the door,

which was barricaded by the bed. The strips of adhesive that had bound Littlefield were on the floor, and both strangers were standing near him. Littlefield observed, "It may interest you, as a physician, to learn that in case of damage, some of the functions of the abdominal brain may be taken over in time by the cranial organ. My friend has recovered to a greater extent than you realized."

He spoke as if unaware that the pounding on the door was increasing in volume. Larkin put his hand to his ears, which were hurting him. He said, "They'll be in soon—and the secret will be out. You've lost."

"Yes, we've lost. Not that we're afraid of you Earth dwellers—although you have shown more ability to fight back than we expected—but once the Narians know what we're trying to do, our mission is a failure. And it's as much due to that fool there—" a nod of his head indicated Verner's body—"as to you. Well, he's had his reward. Personally, I'm not too much disturbed. The war may destroy us both, when it comes and now that we have to find another battleground, it will have to be postponed."

The door began to splinter. Littlefield smiled, and said, "In a way, you may have done us a good turn. But some of my friends may not see it that way, and those people out there are fortunate in that we don't kill wantonly." He turned to James and spoke in the strange unearthly language. James nodded.

The door crashed in, and the two strangers leaped forward. Larkin could follow the movements of James fairly well, but the other stranger was lost to his sight. He could hear screams and thuds, and he did see the body of the distinguished Dr. Martingale sail through the air, hit a wall, and bounce to the floor. He could see other bodies perform unexpected acrobatic feats before collapsing. Then he could hear contradictory, screamed orders, and the sound of running feet. Seconds later, he could feel the shaking of the building, and the rumble of a shattered roof caving in, and then a streak of light dazzled his eyes as it shot toward the heavens.

When things quieted down a little, Martha Johnson was sobbing in the doorway. "George, are you all right?"

He nodded. "I have a headache, but Verner has something worse—"



"Those creatures—"

"They've gone. At least some of them have. Whether they've left others behind on Earth I don't know. But from what Littlefield said, I don't think we're going to be a battleground after all. Not yet, at any rate."

"But what in case they come back?"

"We'll try to make sure that they don't. And now that we're warned, we'll succeed, even if we have to set up an X-ray machine on every street corner, and fluoroscope every man, woman, and child on Earth, if necessary. We'll keep them out."

"Darling, if not for you—you've been wonderful!"

"I can say as much for you, Martha. From now on—"

He was interrupted by the public address system, which

was blaring, "Dr. Verner! Dr. Verner!"

"They don't know yet that he's dead," said Larkin soberly.

"Emergency call for Dr. Verner!" grated the loud speaker.

They looked at each other, and Larkin said, "Martingale has been knocked unconscious, and there's no other surgeon around. I'll probably have to take over. And I give you one guess as to what the operation will be."

The guess was a good one. But despite the strain on his nerves, Dr. Larkin did his cutting with instruments that hardly trembled, although, when the operation was over, both he and Miss Johnson breathed a sigh of relief. It was a real appendix, this time.

**THE END**



## **COULD IT BE LAZINESS?**

Of interest to bald-headed men: Each hair in the scalp is supposed to grow eighty per cent of the time and rest twenty per cent. Maybe yours is just tired. (The hair on the rest of the body grows only forty to fifty per cent of the time.)

# TWO'S A CROWD

By JOHN TOLAND

*Up to the time he found that package in the subway, John had only one Kate. Then she became several. And, as the confusion mounted, he wondered if he was one John or six.*

JOHN boarded the local at Times Square because he hated crowds. The express to the Heights was much faster but he couldn't stand the milling, suffocating crowds. The local was bad enough but if he caught the end car he usually got a seat in the corner and then he was pushed only on one side.

John didn't notice the man next to him until they were pulling out of the 79th Street station. But when he turned to stretch his neck he was struck by his neighbor's rather odd greenish complexion.

"This go to Columbia the University?" questioned the man with a friendly smile when their eyes met.

"Why . . . uh . . . yes. Stay on till 116th Street." John wasn't used to speaking to strangers and his voice was

harsher than usual. From the man's strange accent, John guessed he was a visitor from the United Nations on a sight-seeing trip. Were some Hindus green-skinned? he wondered.

"This sub . . . a . . . way is like mind test, no?" noted the green man pleasantly.

John looked at the man with a perplexed face.

"Significance not clear?" The green man tried to pantomime his meaning with his hands and almost dropped the carefully wrapped package he carried on his lap. It was about the size of a woman's hat box and the green man clutched the slipping package with relief. "Is most precious." He laughed with a strange deep-throated gurgle. . . . "Only one of its . . . likeness on Earth. You live in these environs?" he asked.



It certainly didn't look like the most valuable box on earth.

"One hundred and forty-third Street," mumbled John resenting the other's curiosity. He turned back to his scribbled copy of Baudelaire. He didn't want to encourage further conversation because that might mean complications and his scheduled life had no room for extraneous incidents. For example, after dinner and dishes that night his schedule called for two and a half hours work on his Baudelaire translation. Then from ten until ten-thirty . . . he glanced around with a little blush as though his fellow passengers could read his mind.

John looked up from his notes just as a few passengers were getting out at 116th Street. He noticed the green man still sitting next to him with a faraway expression on his face. "Say, mister!" he said, "I thought you wanted to get off at Columbia."

"This is it?" The green man sprang to his feet and dashed out the subway door just as it was closing.

As the train pulled away from the platform, John noticed the well-wrapped package which had belonged to the green stranger. John's first reaction was to let it sit on the seat and end up in the

Lost and Found Department, but he remembered the strange remark about its great value. Perhaps it contained some priceless art heritage. By the time the train got to 145th Street, John had convinced himself that the most honorable thing he could do was to take the package home and then contact the United Nations.

Although it only weighed about ten pounds, the package seemed intolerably heavy by the time he reached the iron gate in front of the tiny two-story cottage Kate and he shared with Mrs. Moroney. The little blue-green house stood between two huge apartment houses and seemed to John to be a symbol of himself in the big city.

As soon as his key clicked in the lock he heard familiar running footsteps inside and the door was jerked open by a pretty girl with long blonde hair. The girl flung her arms around him and deluged him with kisses. It never ceased to amaze him that such a beautiful and talented girl should find such an ordinary looking person so attractive.

"A present for me!" the girl, Kate, cried happily as she took the package from under his right arm.

"No . . . No . . ." he protested.

"For Molly?" she asked pointing upstairs where Mrs. Moroney had her apartment.

"I found it on the subway. The funniest looking guy left it on the seat."

The girl jumped gleefully. "It's like Christmas. Let's see what's in it!"

John self-righteously took the package away from his wife. "It doesn't belong to us. I'm going to call . . ."

"But you found it!" exclaimed the girl with her strange logic.

"It doesn't belong to me. The guy said it was very valuable. It's the only thing of its kind in the world."

"Well, maybe there'll be a reward for it," said the girl trying to salvage something out of her disappointment.

"What's for dinner?"

"Tuna fish in shells."

"Again?" His face fell and then he immediately caught himself. "Gee, I love tuna fish in shells."

"I know." She led her husband to the kitchen. "But meat is so darned expensive and . . ."

"I do love tuna fish," insisted John. "Especially the way you always fix it with eggs and cheese."

"Well, when you sell that

Baudelaire translation we can order a T-bone steak."

John carefully put the package on the kitchen table. He sighed. "That's just about how much we'll make on it too."

The girl fiddled with the string on the package and then, as if putting temptation behind her, placed the package on top of the old-fashioned ice-box. "Well, let's eat."

Although they didn't talk about the package all through dinner and the dishes both of them were obviously thinking about it.

Kate laughed as she picked up a dish from the floor. "Look, even Needles won't eat the tuna fish any more."

The big black male cat which was lolling under the sink gave a faint squeak in acknowledgment of his name.

"John . . ."

"Yes, dear."

"Don't you think we could . . ." The girl stopped.

John was now seated at the kitchen table, his heavy glasses giving him an owlish expression. All his notes and papers were scattered in front of him. He looked up at his wife impatiently. She knew 7:30 to 10:30 was for Baudelaire.

"Could what?" he asked with a touch of irritation.

"Oh, never mind."

"Look, either ask me a straight question or let me alone. I have to work."

"Well, I don't see how a teeny look would hurt."

John put down his pencil with resignation. "Would hurt what?"

"Why can't we just peek in the package?"

"What package?"

"You know very well," she said picking the package off the ice-box and putting it in the center of the table.

"I've told you it doesn't belong to us."

"But it's our duty to open it!"

"Oh, cut it out!"

"Really. It may contain something . . . well perishable . . . like a plant. Maybe it needs water or air or . . ."

"Would you want someone opening *your* package?"

"What package?"

"You know what I mean. If you . . ."

The girl shook her head. "You don't make sense." She pulled at the string. "See, it's loose! I'll fix it." She fiddled with the string until it was completely untied.

"Now, look what you did!" said her husband leaning forward curiously.

"Come on. Let's just take a peek. I'll bet you're as curious as I am."

John pushed his notes aside and pulled the box towards him. "Okay, it's Kismet I guess." He quickly pulled the paper off an ordinary cardboard box.

"See what's in the box. Hurry!" cried the impatient girl.

John opened the cardboard box and lifted out a strange, shiny oblong of metal.

"It . . . it looks like one of those new fangled grills," said the girl with disappointment. "I thought you said it was so darn valuable."

"I'm only telling you what the guy said." John pulled a little knob and a door swung open. "It does look a little like a grill but it doesn't have any wires."

"There's a button, John," said the girl. "Let's put a piece of bread in that tray dingus and then push the button. Maybe it toasts the bread and plays 'Yankee Doodle.'" The girl quickly got a piece of bread and put it on the tray. John slid the tray inside the machine and closed the door.

"Shall I push the button?" he asked.

"Sure. Go ahead. This is fun."

"If we suddenly disappear

and end up in Walla Walla, don't say I didn't warn you."

"I always wanted to see Walla Walla anyway. Push it; this suspense is killing me."

John pushed the button and there was a tiny explosion.

"Sounds like it blew a fuse," said the girl. "Go ahead and open the darn thing up."

John cautiously opened the door and pulled out the tray. To their amazement they saw on the tray two pieces of bread.

"It must have sliced the bread in two!" cried Kate. "That's doing it the hard way."

John picked up the two pieces of bread and examined them. "Boy, this must have been a monster sized slice of bread!"

The girl leaned forward. "The bread wasn't sliced. The darn machine made another piece of bread."

"Oh, stop it!"

"I tell you it must have. Those are whole pieces of bread!"

"Impossible. Look, I'll prove it to you." John quickly put his stubby, gnawed yellow pencil on the tray, slid it in the machine, closed the door and pressed the button. "You wait and see," he said after the machine had made

another pop. He pulled out the tray. Two stubby, gnawed, yellow pencils lay in the tray.

"My . . . good God!" gasped John when he realized the possibilities of the metal machine.

"Put some change in and see what happens!" cried the excited girl.

With fumbling fingers John put a quarter in the tray.

Again the button was pressed and again the tray withdrawn. Two quarters shone up at them.

Kate eagerly picked up the two coins and examined them. "They're both 1951 with Denver mint marks! Oh, John!" She threw her arms around her husband as she squealed with delight.

"It . . . it can't be. There's no such thing in the world!" he stammered.

"That's what the man told you. It was the only one in existence!"

"But a machine can't . . . can't duplicate things!"

"It just did."

"But it can't . . . not without raw materials and . . . well, it's not possible."

"Maybe it's not possible. But it works. Put some bills in. The heck with bothering with chicken feed!"

"I don't believe it," mut-

tered John as he put his only five-dollar bill in the tray.

"Now do you believe it?" almost screamed the frantic girl holding up a second five-dollar bill a moment later.

"It's . . . fantastic!"

"Who cares what it is as long as it works! Oh, John, we're rich! We're rich! Put both fives in again. Let's make some more money!"

John put the two bills in his wallet as he slowly shook his head. "It's not right. We can't do it. It's forgery."

"How can it be forgery? It's exactly the same isn't it?"

John put the two quarters in the tray. "Silver coins are all right." He quickly made four quarters.

"If it's not right to make five-dollar bills how come it's all right to make measly quarters?"

"The quarters are worth their weight in silver. Don't you see it's not ethical to . . ."

"Ethical, smethical . . . I . . ."

"The diamond!" shouted John. "We wouldn't be hurting anyone if we made a few genuine copies of our diamond!"

The girl skidded on the linoleum as she ran to the tiny adjoining bedroom to dig out their one valuable jewel, a yel-

low diamond worth \$300. With trembling fingers she put the diamond in the tray. "Oh, please, don't wake me up now if it's a dream. Let me have a diamond bath first!"

In five minutes they made fifty yellow diamonds, all with the same identical scratches.

"Oh, John! Now you can quit editing those silly textbooks and you can spend all your time making translations!"

"And you can get a fur coat! And . . ."

The door bell rang.

The two looked at each other guiltily. "Hide everything," whispered Kate. "It may be for us." She waited for a minute and then went to the front door.

"So sorry to inconvenience you," said a man with a greenish face.

"I'm sorry you have the wrong place," said the girl curtly.

The man smiled. "May I intrude myself? Your husband could I see?" He peered over her head. "Ah, yes, he is there. My friend!" he called to John.

"C . . . come on in," invited John.

Kate apprehensively led the green man into the kitchen.

"Sorry to make my intru-



sion but on sub-a-way I leave package. Perhaps you to pick up?"

"Package? Package?" cut in Kate before John could answer. "He didn't find any package. If he'd found a package he would have brought it home. That's logical, isn't it? And he didn't bring it home. Why don't you go to the Lost and Found. It's over by the river. Take a crosstown at 145th and go till you come to the river and..." She rattled her words to keep John from interrupting.

"And I had so hoped..." started the green man with a sheepish smile. "Is so embarrassing. I remember you say you live on this 143. I go to every house. Package must be found. Very dangerous." He shook his head. "Could bring great pain and . . . and tragedy."

"I'm sorry, mister," said Kate leading the man into the hall by the arm. "If we hear about your package, we'll call you. Yes, don't call us we'll call you."

The green man turned when he reached the front door. He smiled wisely as he looked at the two. "Tomorrow I come back. Perhaps you find package in the . . . yes . . . meantime. Happy sunrise!" He bowed politely and left.

"We shouldn't have done that!" exclaimed John stricken with remorse.

"You heard him say he was coming back tomorrow night. Look, we'll make a couple of bushels of diamonds and quarters tonight and then he can have his old machine tomorrow."

John shook his head. "But he said it was dangerous..."

"Oh, please." The girl laughed.

"And would bring pain and..."

"Tragedy. Yes, I heard him. Well, what did you expect him to say? To tell us we had hold of the most valuable little old gadget in the world? Come on, John, boy. Back to the diamond mines!"

In half an hour they had several large cartons filled with diamonds.

"Oh, my aching finger!" moaned the girl, holding up the index finger of her right hand. "I can't push the button once more with this pinky. I wish I had another finger!"

"Well, just stick it in the machine and you'll get another one," joked her husband.

"Hey, that's an idea!" She put her right hand inside the machine. "Here goes," she teased.

"Don't be foolish!" he cried in fear. "You can't tell what'd happen. You might end up with six fingers on your hand."

"Or two hands."

"Or ten fingers."

The girl laughed. "If you want to have a gruesome idea how about imagining just another disembodied hand."

"Oh, please!" John's eyes looked sick at the idea. "Now, come on, stop horsing around. You're acting like a baby!"

"I'm acting like a baby!" She teasingly put the index finger of her left hand in the button.

"You haven't got as much sense as Needles." As his name was called the big black cat jumped up on the kitchen table. He startled Kate so much she pressed the little red button. There was a blue flash of light, much bigger than the previous flashes because the compartment door was opened.

Kate screamed and pulled her tingling right hand out of the machine.

"What in the . . . devil . . ." she cried.

"Happened?" finished her exact counterpart who now appeared at her side. Kate looked into her own face and both girls fainted.

"Oh, no!" moaned John

when he saw two Kates on the floor in front of him.

At eleven o'clock that night the three were still arguing.

"What kind of a man do you call yourself!" cried one Kate shaking an accusing finger at the harried man, "not to know your own wife!"

"But, dear I . . ."

"How dare you call that . . . that . . . imitation dear?" shouted the other Kate indignantly.

"Girls . . . girls, please!" pleaded John, "you'll have to give me time . . . I . . . I just can't seem to . . ." He wiped his dripping forehead. "You both look exactly alike. Your voices are alike. Your . . ." He smiled. "I know, aha!"

"What's . . ." started one Kate.

". . . up?" finished the other one.

"Open your mouth," he instructed the girl on his right. She did as she was told. John rubbed his hands. "Aha, just as I thought!" He kissed her.

"You stinker!" The other girl slammed a rolled up newspaper over his head.

"But, dear," explained John turning to face the furious girl with the newspaper. "I . . . er . . . mean . . . Miss, I know this one is my wife."

He put his arm around the girl on his right.

"How do you know that?"

"A filling fell out of one of her lower teeth yesterday. She has to get it fixed tomorrow. Isn't that right, Kate?" The girl on his right nodded happily.

"Well, what do you think this hole is?" asked the other girl pointing to one of her lower teeth. "Mammoth Cave?"

John peered into the mouth of the other girl and then sighed. "God, she's right. You both have identical cavities!" He sank into a chair exhausted. Then he quickly bounded to his feet, his face again smiling. "I have the acid test!"

"The acid test?" shouted both girls together.

"Who wants to try it first?" he asked.

Both girls took a step forward.

"Just a minute. We'll do this the democratic way. Choose a number."

"Ten!" cried both Kates simultaneously.

They finally picked one of the Kates by flipping a coin.

"What're you going to do?" asked the girl who had lost.

"You just wait here. You'll find out later," said John. "Come on." He took the other

Kate by the hand and led her into the bedroom.

"What's the big deal?" asked the chosen girl when the door had been closed.

John pulled the girl to him and kissed her. "There are certain little things a husband . . ."

"Why you!" The girl slapped John in the face.

"What in heck?" he cried in surprise.

"Some test!" shouted the girl taking another swing at John. "Going to try it on both of us, huh?" She opened the door and called to her double. "You know how he was going to find out who was who?" she called.

"Not by . . ." guessed the other girl angrily running to attack the frightened man.

"Girls! Girls, please. I was only trying to be practical . . ."

"Practical . . ."

"Schmactical!" finished the other girl. Then the two Kates looked at each other with mixed distrust and understanding. Without a word they disappeared in the bedroom and slammed the door.

"Hey!" called John. "Where am I going to sleep?"

"Under the sink," said one soprano voice sweetly.

"With Needles," added the other soprano.

Breakfast the next morning was unpleasant and frightening to John. Because of the added member in the family, extra eggs, bacon and bread had to be duplicated in the machine. Although the food tasted the same as it had for hundreds of breakfasts, the idea of eating duplicated food made it lump in his stomach.

Needles, too, was distressed by having two mistresses. He not only got two breakfasts but he was forced to go out in the back yard twice for but one purpose.

Whenever John smiled at one girl, the other one gave him an icy and threatening stare and he soon discovered it was safer to keep his eyes on the table.

"Well," he said with an effort to be hearty after he had finished his meal, "I'll see you girls tonight. Have a . . . good day."

"There's one consolation anyway," grunted one Kate.

"What's that?" asked John.

"At least now there's two of us to do the housework," explained the other Kate.

John didn't earn a small fraction of the \$2.21 he was paid an hour at the Universal Press where he was one of the assistant editors in the

school textbook department. The words on the latest thing in algebra danced before his eyes, and whenever he looked up at Jones, his opposite number in the Spelling Section, he saw double.

At 4:30, Miss Bennett who was secretary for six unimportant editors called him to the phone. "It's your dentist," she explained.

"Is your wife going to have a baby?" asked Dr. Smithers when he had picked up the phone.

"I hope not!" devoutly shouted John.

"Well, she acted awfully funny today!" said the old family dentist. "First she came in at two o'clock to get that filling replaced. She left at 2:30 and returned in ten minutes . . ."

"I know," sighed John, "to get another filling."

"How did you know?"

"I . . . I think she needs a rest in the country, Dr. Smithers."

"She certainly needs something. My wife acted like that just before our first . . . Say, one thing bothered me."

"Yes, Doctor."

"How in the devil did she get that first filling out so fast?"

"She . . . must have sneezed hard," explained John. "I'll

drop by and see you about that bridge of mine when I sell my Baudelaire translation, Dr. Smithers," he added hurriedly. "G'bye."

On the long trip home on the subway John thought of the three cartons of yellow diamonds they'd made the night before. Even with two wives . . . He smiled. It had its amusing aspects when the shock of impossibility had worn off. Then he thought of the painful scene of the previous night and the even more painful sleep he had had to steal on Molly's living room couch. Definitely, one of the Kates would have to go. There was just barely enough of him for one girl.

When his key rattled in the lock on the little green cottage, the usual feminine clatter of heels was absent. He quietly opened the door and tiptoed to the kitchen. The two Kates were sitting at the table, their faces hard and relentless.

"Gin!" shouted one Kate triumphantly.

"And me with all these picture cards!" said the other one disgustedly.

"Hi, girls!" greeted John tentatively.

To his amazement both Kates smiled sweetly, got up

from the table and first one and then the other kissed him affectionately.

"Well!" he sighed happily. "What's . . ."

"We both decided," said the first Kate.

"We'd been unfair," finished the other. "Now sit down, honey. We have a wonderful dinner for you!"

"Tuna fish in shells?" he asked expectantly.

The first Kate opened up the ice-box and took out a huge steak. "T-bone!"

"And champagne!" said the other Kate taking two bottles off the ice.

"Wh-where'd you get the money?" he asked tentatively. "You must have made a lot of quarters."

"Quarters, poooh!" said the first Kate grabbing one of his hands. "Come in here."

The other Kate took his other hand and John was led into the tiny living room.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned when he saw the neat mountains of five-dollar bills which almost covered the floor.

"Three million . . ." started the first Kate.

". . . and five dollars!" triumphantly added the other. "We didn't figure quite right."

"But I told you it wasn't honest to . . ."

The two girls looked at each other and shook their heads in sympathy.

"But I . . . I insist you burn the money!"

"You insist!" cried one Kate. "You always said the house should be run democratically!"

"You certainly did!" affirmed the other.

"Sure, so I did."

"All right," said one Kate triumphantly. "We'll take a democratic vote. All those in favor raise right hands." Two hands shot in the air.

"But . . ." argued the frustrated husband.

"Overruled!" chorused the two girls gaily leading him back to the kitchen.

It was almost 7:30 when the last dish was dried and put away.

"Things really get done fast now," exclaimed one Kate. "Oh, I forgot to feed Needles." She went to the ice-box. When the cat saw his can of Three Little Kittens in the girl's hand he looked sickly at John and dove under the washing machine.

"Oh, I fed him already," explained the other Kate, putting the duplicating machine on the table.

"You're not going to make more money?" gasped the

amazed John who had spread his precious Baudelaire notes on the table.

"We got tired of yellow diamonds," explained one Kate.

"So late this afternoon we sold a handful of yellow diamonds for one beautiful solitaire." The other Kate brought out a large, sparkling diamond.

"And now we're going to make solitaires!" said the first one who suddenly burst in laughter.

"What's so funny?" asked John.

"We really drove the neighborhood crazy today until we started working together!"

The other Kate came over. "You said it. Everybody thought they were seeing double. Finally we worked out a system before Molly could catch on."

Two pieces of bread suddenly appeared on the table.

"What the . . ." exclaimed John.

"Who threw the bread?" asked one Kate.

"Not me!" cried the other.

Two gnawed yellow pencils miraculously materialized on the table.

"My God!" moaned John. "We're haunted. I'm seeing things."

"You're not seeing things,"

said one of the Kates practically as she picked up the pencils. "It must be . . ."

Four quarters all dated 1951 with Denver mint marks next appeared. Four mates followed in a few seconds.

"The darn machine!" finished the other Kate in an awed voice.

John twisted his neck and looked at the kitchen clock. "It's 7:30. Just twenty-four hours after the first . . ."

Two five-dollar bills joined the other objects on the table.

"Everything is double what it was last night!" said John in a horrified voice. "It must automatically double anything it originally made every *twenty-four hours!*"

"So what?" said the two girls in gleeful unison as yellow diamonds started pouring onto the table and rolling onto the floor.

Needles who had come out from under the washing machine to see what was going on, gave a frightened howl and streaked for Molly's apartment.

The two girls were dancing around the table, hand in hand.

"You fools!" cried John when he had finally quieted them.

"What are you raving at?" asked one of the girls.

"Don't you see what's going to happen in about . . ." He looked at the clock . . . ". . . ten seconds?"

"Sure, we know . . . more diamonds!" cried one of the girls.

"No, no!" The two girls sobered when they saw the look on John's face. "Now do you understand?" he asked.

"You mean . . ." began one of the girls in a small voice.

Two more Kates were sitting on top of the yellow diamonds.

"Oh, my God!" cried one of the new Kates. "Two more of us!"

The four Kates gave a sick groan and would have fainted if a knock on the front door hadn't come at that moment.

"Maybe it's him!" gasped John desperately. His subconscious corrected the "him" to "he" even as he ran to open the door.

"The evening is good?" inquired the greenish man with a friendly smile.

"For God's sake come in!" John dragged the green man into the kitchen.

"Aha!" He said as he saw the four pale-faced Kates. "It is just as I have predicted. A . . ."

The four girls moanfully chorused, "Tragedy!"

"I am so sorry. I warn this is so dangerous." He touched the duplicating machine and it disappeared.

"How the heck'd you do that?" asked John.

"A child in Betelgeuse does same all day long." He waved his hand and the machine reappeared.

"Holy . . ."

"A mere form of . . . er . . . transportation." The green man looked around the room at the diamonds.

"The living room, too," confessed John.

The green man shook his head and then smiled. "My three-year-old in Betelgeuse . . . we have same trouble with him. He lack the responsibility too."

"Well, what're you going to do about all this!" sputtered John.

The green man smiled as he patted John on the head. "You so like my son."

"The three-year-old?" asked John.

The green man nodded. "First we must to rectify certain mistake." He touched the pile of yellow diamonds on the table and the jewels disappeared as the four girls moaned.

"We have trouble with our women at the first too," whispered the green man as he

walked into the living room followed by John. "Aha, very industrious, these Terran ladies!" he noted as he saw the huge piles of money. With a touch of his finger all the money disappeared.

"Where'd it go?" asked John.

The green man made a vague wave of his right hand. "Into the outer space. I know is messy but space very large," he apologized.

"What . . ."

"About . . ."

". . . us . . ."

". . . girls?" asked the four girls.

"Is simple." The green man shrugged his shoulders. "I take three of you to Betelgeuse."

"Ohhhh!" cried the four with a mass look of pain.

"What is the wrong?" asked the green man.

"Don't you see?" said John. "Even though each one *knows* she's the original Kate she's afraid she'll be sent to your Betel . . . micallit . . . without me!"

The four girls glared at John.

"You conceited fool!" one of them shouted. "We just don't want to go to Betel-micallit!"

Suddenly all four girls



broke down and rushed for John.

"Oh, John!" they all moaned.

"Terran ladies!" The green man shook his head in wonder. "So easy." He led John to the kitchen, put the puzzled editor's hand in the duplicating machine and with three presses of the button made three more Johns appear. "Now is one for each!" he said with a satisfied smile.

Then he rapidly manipulated his fingers. There was a puff of smoke and when the room had cleared only one John and one Kate stood facing the green man.

"Very poor the technique," he muttered in self-criticism. "Usually no smoke."

"Wh—where are the others?" asked John in awe.

"They live happily in Betelgeuse."

John and Kate didn't say anything for a minute but they looked at each other with wide, horrified eyes.

"Did we . . . we dream all this?" asked Kate throwing her arms around her husband.

John pointed at the three cartons of yellow diamonds on the floor which the green man had forgotten to dispose of.

"Oh, John!" Kate jumped

up and down gaily. "Then we're still rich. And there's only two of us."

"And look!" John pointed to the duplicating machine which was still sitting on the table. "He forgot to . . ."

"Sorry to intrude," said the green man reappearing and picking up the duplicating machine. "Forgetful . . . forgetful." He shook his head. "My wives all say so forgetful. It has been most pleasant but must go Betelgeuse-side."

"Ah, mister," called John with a small voice.

"Yes . . ."

"You forgot these," said Kate pointing to the three cartons of yellow diamonds. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"So?" The green man shrugged his shoulders. "Keep as souvenir of the occasion." Then he smiled and disappeared for the last time.

"Oh, John!" cried Kate. "He left the diamonds!"

John watched her with an indulgent smile. Then a crease of worry came on his forehead. Would he ever be positive this was the original Kate? He sat down at the table and straightened out his Baudelaire notes. After a few minutes he looked up to see Kate staring intently at him.

Now there was a worried look on her face.

**THE END**

*This is the story of a world reversed. Where the great Commandment has been changed to: Thou Shalt Kill. Where gentleness is unknown. Where the law men live by, reads—*

# ***Blessed Are the Murderous***

**By IVAR JORGENSEN**

IT WAS still dark when someone pulled my hair and woke me up. I grabbed my club to kill whoever it was and then I heard Hilly say, "Wake up, Dan. Wake up and come on out." She was looking through a rip in the tent and I could see her face against the faint light that was just coming up over the hills.

I crawled out of my sleeping fur and took my club and skin and went out through the rip. I went quietly because I didn't want my father and mother to wake up. I put on my skin outside and told Hilly, "That was very dangerous, pulling my hair like that. I might have smashed your head."

She laughed. "You talk very big for only a boy who has not even killed yet."

That made me mad and I wanted to hit her. "I'm seven-

teen and I'll make my kill. Don't worry." I didn't hit her because there will be plenty of time for that. Someday I will marry Hilly and I will hit her then because a wife never dares hit a husband back.

I said, "Why did you wake me up?"

"I thought you might want to pick fat from the spit with me. And besides, I have news."

I thought of the burned fat on the spit and got hungry. "All right," I said, and we went very quietly to the spit so as not to wake anyone up. They had cooked an animal the night before, so there were big chunks of crisp fat and even pieces of burned meat laying around the fire. I was glad Hilly had got me up early enough to beat the other young ones to the spit.

We began eating and didn't



The fight raged while the vultures waited.

talk much until we'd had all we wanted. It was very good and we ate most of what was laying around. When I was full, I said, "What news have you got?"

"We are going to move away," she said, importantly.

"How do you know that?"

"We are going to move to a place beside a river."

"How do you know?"

"A Scout came back late last night and talked to the Leader. I heard them talking. He told of this place beside a big river with lots of grass for our animals."

When she mentioned animals, I got thirsty. I said, "I want milk."

Her eyes widened as she looked at me. "Do you dare?"

"Certainly I dare. Nothing scares me."

She was doubtful for a minute. Then she said, "Well, all right. I'll go with you. But be ready to run."

I was scared too, but I would not let Hilly know it. The milk is for the little ones that the mothers carry on their backs, and if any of us younger ones are caught taking it, we are badly beaten. It is the Law. A younger one is sometimes crippled for breaking the law and limps for the rest of his life.

We went very quietly to

where the herd was grazing and saw the guard asleep against a tree. That was very foolish of him because if he did not wake up before the group began coming out of their tents, he would be killed. Foolish for him, but good for us because we went past him and found a cow with her bag full and began drinking milk. It was very good and I finally had to pull Hilly away or she would have made herself sick. We went quietly back to the tents and I was glad the guard did not wake up. I hoped he would keep on sleeping so I could watch the Cops kill him. When I grow up, I am going to be a Cop. They are the biggest and strongest men in the group and have many privileges. First food and the best women when they want to get married. Almost as many privileges as the Scouts.

The Scouts of course, have more privileges than anyone but the Leader. Only the Scouts can take a woman without marrying her. Maybe, when I grow up I will be a Scout instead of a Cop. Not because I care about women, but they are the bravest in the group. They go out ahead of the group and wander anywhere they want to. I guess

maybe they can even go to a city if they want to, although I don't think even a Scout would go into a city.

Hilly and I were not hungry, so we sat down on the side of the tents nearest the herd so we could see the guard killed if he didn't wake up in time. I said, "Did the Scout tell the Leader whether we would have to fight another group to get this new place to live?"

"He said the place was deserted, but there is a group camped along the way we have to go. We might have to fight to get past them."

"I would like that."

"Hilly leaned against me. "I wish you would make your kill so we could get married. Then we could stay in the same tent."

I wanted that too. It would be very good to be boss of my own tent away from my father and mother. Having young ones of my own to tell what to do and boss around the way my father bossed me around. I didn't let Hilly know how I felt, though. I said, "I'll make my kill, all right. Maybe when we meet one of those tribes on the way."

Hilly is very changeable. When I said that, she laughed. "And maybe you'll be killed yourself and I'll marry some-

body who isn't clumsy and can stay out of the way of a club."

She made me so mad I almost hit her but just then the guard woke up. This disappointed me and I forgot about what Hilly had said. "No use staying around here," I told her. "I'm going to the tent."

The group was waking up, now and as we walked down the line, the Leader came out of his tent, stretching and yawning. He was the biggest man in the group, of course, or he wouldn't have been the Leader. He had killed many enemies from other groups and he was looked up to by everyone. The Scout followed him out of the tent, so maybe they had talked all night instead of sleeping. The Scout was a big man too and the knife he carried at his belt glittered in the morning light. Only Scouts carry knives of course because there are so few. The only knives the groups have are the ones somebody goes into the cities to get, and going into a city is almost certain death. I saw a man once, who went into a city. He went with the permission of the Leader, to get knives, and he brought back three and he was very proud because he'd gone into a city and come back alive. But in-

a few days, he began to get big sores all over his body and two days later he died in agony.

The women were putting food on the plates now. Other women were going with pails down to where the herd was to get milk for the little ones. My mother and father came out of our tent and we went together to get our plates. I wasn't hungry, but I ate anyway because I did not want them to think maybe I'd been down where the herd was.

After the group got through eating, the Leader hit the steel bar in front of his tent and everybody gathered around to hear what he had to say. He spoke in a very loud voice. "I have a report that there is fine grazing land about ten days to the south, and with cold weather coming on, I think it is better that we go there. This is a good time to travel, because no one in the group is sick and we have no cripples. So we will start as soon as the tents are packed."

Everyone was very happy about leaving the camp because the grass was getting short and pretty soon it would be too cold to be comfortable. Sometimes the group would spend a whole winter in cold country, but the hunters al-

ways had trouble finding food and we had to eat some of our own animals.

My mother and I began taking the tent down while my father went to get a horse. He brought the horse back and packed our tent and furs on it. The whole group was busy and it was very exciting for me. When we were ready to go, I ran back to where Hilly's mother and father were packing their things and told Hilly she could walk with me when we got started. I was doing her a big favor and got mad when she didn't thank me, but I decided not to hit her in front of the others. I would wait until I got her alone somewhere.

The group was all packed and ready now, and the Scouts went out ahead and a little while afterwards we followed, with the Leader at the head of the group and the Cops walking on both sides. The women led the horses and the herd guards drove the cows along behind. All the men carried their clubs because you could never tell when we might be attacked by the men of other groups who might be hidden where the Scouts couldn't see them.

There was not much danger of this, though, because the

country was pretty flat. It was so level we could see our three Scouts spread out ahead of us. We had four Scouts for a long time, but one of them got killed when some men from another group tried to steal our herd one night. Two guards were killed too. It was a great loss, having a Scout killed.

Hilly and I walked behind the group a little way in front of the herd. I carried my club and told her not to be afraid because if we were attacked, I would protect her.

I felt good, walking along with the group, following the stone road from hole to hole. It was strange about the roads. They would go along for a while, flat and smooth, though overgrown with grass and bushes in most places and pretty well covered with dirt in others.

Then we would come to big holes—big enough for the whole group to hide in, with the stone of the road broken and smashed and pieces of it laying far away from where it had been—or must have been in the beginning.

This was a great mystery to me—what had happened to the roads. I had often wanted to ask my father or the Leader or maybe some of the older men of the group, but I'd

never dared. They didn't like young people asking them questions and maybe they didn't know about the roads either.

We came to a hole and the group swung out around it. It was a big one and it would take us quite a while to get around to where the road went on.

Hilly must have been reading my thoughts, because she said, "How do you suppose they got there?"

"What?"

"The holes."

"How would I know?"

"They couldn't have just come from nowhere."

"Maybe a big wind came and blew the road to pieces."

Hilly thought about that. "Was there ever a wind big enough to do anything like that?"

"I think so. I've heard about winds that come like a big tube—very black—across the country, and tear everything up that they hit."

"Well, maybe. But if that's the way it was, why didn't the wind blow the whole road up? Why just in spots?"

"Shut up!" I said. "You talk too much."

"I just asked a question."

"You aren't supposed to ask questions. Women are sup-

posed to be quiet and work—like my mother!"

Hilly shut up because she knew I was right. I didn't like her babbling all the time, and besides I didn't have the answer to her question and I don't like women asking questions I can't answer:

We went along in silence for a while and then I almost fell down. Not because I stumbled, but because someone pushed me. I got back my balance and looked to see and a big, heavy youth snarled, "Why don't you watch where you're going?"

It was LeRoy. LeRoy is older and heavier than I am and he hates me because he wants to marry Hilly and have her for his woman. I raised my club and said, "What do you mean by pushing me?" and LeRoy grinned and said, "Go ahead. Go ahead and hit me!"

If I had, I'd have smashed his skull. He was willing to take a chance on that, though, because by hitting him, I'd have broken the Law. Any man who hits another man of the group is killed right away. This is because there must be no fighting inside a group. If there is, that weakens the group so that they can be easily beaten in a fight. You

can hit women, of course, but that isn't dangerous to the group's safety because women never hit back so a fight is never started and the group is not weakened.

As I lowered my club, LeRoy came close to me and whispered, "I'm going to kill you sometime, Dan."

That amazed me. "Why—you wouldn't dare!" I said. "It's against the Law!"

"I'll make it look like an accident," he whispered. "I've thought up a way." He grinned and went on ahead, swaggering and looking back at Hilly. He looked at her legs very boldly and laughed. I'd never been so mad in my life. I wanted to swing my club and kill LeRoy more than anything I'd ever wanted before. But I didn't, because I wouldn't dare break the Law.

"He said he'd kill you," Hilly whispered, and there was fear in her voice.

"That doesn't mean anything."

"Why don't you tell the Leader?"

"Me—speak to the Leader? Are you crazy?"

"A Scout, then. Or a Cop."

"They wouldn't believe me. Besides, they wouldn't be interested until LeRoy did what he said he would. Then they'd just kill him. They can't kill



him for just saying something."

"But I'm afraid. He said he'd make it look like an accident and LeRoy doesn't talk idly."

I wanted to hit her for saying that because it meant she thought LeRoy was smarter than I was. I didn't hit her though because she might have fallen down and hurt herself and then I'd have had to carry her.

We walked until the sun was straight over our heads before we ran into trouble. We were on a smooth stretch of road when the three Scouts up ahead all held up their hands at the same time. The group stopped and waited.

Nothing happened for a little while. We all stood without moving, the Cops in their positions around the group, and the Scouts up ahead alert and ready for anything.

After a long time, four Scouts from another group came down the road from the way we were going. We hadn't seen them because the road turned there and a lot of trees had hidden them.

The other Scouts stopped instantly and two of them went back to talk to their Leader. Everybody waited again, and then the Scouts re-

turned and began moving toward us very slowly. This of course, was the Law. When two groups met on a road, the one that stopped first, didn't move and the other Scouts came forward. Of course, the Law is often broken by all the groups. Our group has broken it when setting an ambush for another group. But the country was pretty flat, around here and there was no chance for an ambush.

The Scouts of the group were supposed to come within talking distance and tell our Scouts to get our group off the road so they could pass. Our Leader would refuse of course, and then the fight would start—unless the other group was a lot bigger than ours. Then our group might try to run if there was time, but usually, there would be a fight anyhow. This time it was different. The Leader of the other group came in sight and moved forward behind his Scouts. This happened once, once in a long while. I had never seen it happen before. I knew what it meant, though. The other group was friendly. They were willing not to fight. So all that was left was to find out which group would get off the road so the other group could go by.

As soon as the other Leader appeared, our Leader went out from our group and walked ahead until he was up behind our Scouts and could talk to the other Leader. They talked. We couldn't hear what was said, but our Leader came back and orders were sent out for us to get off the road and walk around beside it.

We did as we were told and pretty soon the other group came in sight walking on the other side of the road, and we could see that our leader had been very wise, because the group was almost twice as big as ours.

But Hilly was bothered. She said, "If the other group is so big, why don't they want to fight us?"

This made me mad. "Are you questioning the wisdom of the Leader?"

"I'm not questioning anything. It just seems funny that with all those Cops and men, they'd let us go by."

I said, "You better keep your mouth shut or somebody will hear you and you'll be beaten. You'd deserve it too. Nobody is supposed to question the Leader."

"You—you wouldn't tell anyone, would you?"

I thought it over and said I wouldn't but told her never to say anything like that

again; that whatever the Leader does is right.

I was thinking about this as we walked on past the other group and got back on the road; thinking how wise and clever Leaders were; how they made decisions for the groups and were always right.

And while I was thinking about this, part of that other group—a part they left behind them down the road—ambushed us from some trees, and we were in bad trouble.

Our Scouts must have been napping. Probably they thought everything was all right because we had just passed that group and they'd been friendly. Anyhow, they didn't see the part that was hiding behind the trees. That part charged out at us and we were in the middle of a fight.

I yelled at Hilly to go back with the cattle where all the rest of the women were going. Then I didn't have time to worry about her because men of the other group were all around me.

This was the first fight I'd every really been in and it was wonderful. The marks on the men of the other group were daubs of dirt on one side of their faces. Our mark was better and more permanent—the hair on one side of our

heads cut shorter than on the other. This was so both sides could be known in a fight and we would not kill men of our own group.

I saw a daub-face charging forward and swung my club in a circle and hit him on the back of the head. He went forward on his face and clawed the ground with one hand while he reached for his head with the other. I smashed his fingers when I brought my club down on his head the second time. I broke his skull. He lay still after that.

There was growling and snarling and yelling all around me. A lot of action, and I was happy because I had made my kill and now I could marry Hilly. But there were some other things to be done first, so I kept on fighting, swinging my club and trying to hit somebody.

I missed several times and somebody hit me on the shoulder and I was knocked down. My shoulder hurt very badly as I rolled over and looked up and saw a daub-face with his club over his head, just bringing it down on my skull. I rolled, so my skull wouldn't be there when the club came down—and it wasn't. I swung my own club in a low circle and hit the daub-face on the

ankle. He dropped his club and howled and grabbed his ankle and while he was dancing on one leg, I got up and broke his skull, so that was two.

Things weren't going very well for our group, though. The rest of the other group had come back and were attacking from behind our cattle and horses. Some of them had stopped to hit our women who were fighting back with their hands and teeth.

The daub-faces came at us in a solid line and we were pushed back away from the road, leaving quite a few dead men on the ground. I got cut off from our group along with another man and we had several daub-faces trying to kill us at once and all we could do was to defend ourselves. I discovered something important while I was fighting; that the best defense, when there are too many against you is to dodge clubs and go for knees and ankles. When you break a man's knee or his ankle, he's always too busy howling and holding his leg to kill you.

So I went after them that way and had pretty good luck, I was able to break four legs and kill one man before a club hit me on the head and

dazed me. The daub-faces whose legs I smashed, yowled plenty and went hobbling back to their group and as soon as he got a chance, the man I was with ran back, too. I thought this was very cowardly, leaving me alone with two daub-faces. But one of them took out after the other man which left only one. This one swung his club at me and I ducked and he hit a rock and his club snapped off at the handle. That left him without any way of defending himself—in perfect shape to be killed, so I killed him.

I was tired and pretty well satisfied with myself for the skulls I'd split and all the legs I'd broken and I stood there for a minute, getting my breath back. That was a mistake, though, because something hit me on the head and it seemed to split wide open. The pain was terrible for a second and then I knew nothing at all. It was just as though I were asleep or not even alive.

I came alive gradually with a very big pain in my head. I could hear the sounds of fighting but it was a long way off. I could hear women screaming, too. But when I opened my eyes, I forgot all about those sounds, because someone

was very close to me. That meant danger, so I struck out at whoever it was.

I hit something soft and there was a squeal and then I saw Hilly kneeling beside me holding her stomach. She was mad, she said, "What did you hit me for?"

"I didn't know it was you. Why aren't you with the women?"

I saw now, that her skin was torn and she was holding scraps of it around her. They were very small scraps. She was almost naked. She said, "A man grabbed me, but I bit him and got away. Our group was beaten. Most of the men were killed and the rest are being chased and killed right now."

"That's impossible! Our group couldn't be beaten. We fight too well."

"I'd like to know what you'd call it, then! Go down and tell all the dead men we won, and see what they say about it!"

I sat up and my head hurt very badly. I looked over toward the road and saw what Hilly said was true. Most of our men were dead and our stock was already being driven off and our women were being chased in all directions.

I had to look over a ridge

of rocks to see what was going on, and Hilly said, "I dragged you back here after I saved your life."

"Saved my life?"

"Yes. I killed a man."

"You killed a daub-face?"

"No. It was LeRoy. When the daub-faces began chasing our women, I ran up here where I'd seen you fighting. Just as I got here, LeRoy knocked you down. Before he could kill you, I picked up a rock and split his skull."

"That's impossible!" I said. "LeRoy wouldn't kill one of his own group in a fight!"

"Well, he made an awfully good try at it before I killed him. Don't you remember what he said?"

"Yes, I remember. But it's hard to believe he'd really try it." Then I thought of something. "You killed *him*! That means the Leader will order you killed!"

"What Leader? The one we had is dead. He was stupid, so he's dead and all the rest of our men are too."

"Don't talk about our Leader that way! He was a wise man!"

"Well, maybe. But I'd rather be alive and stupid than as wise as he was and dead."

I didn't like to have her talk that way, but she did have a point. Besides, my

head hurt too much to think about it. I said, "What do we do now? What do we do when we haven't got a group to go back to?"

"I'd say we get out of here as fast as we can, but I'm only a woman, so you decide. Maybe you'd like to go down there and get killed?"

"Of course I'll make the decision," I said. "And I'll make it without any help from you. We'll get out of here as fast as we can. But where will we go?"

"How do I know? I've never been anywhere—except with the group."

I said, "You'll have to have a skin. You can't go around like that."

Out beyond the rock ridge, I saw LeRoy's body sprawled out. "You can use his," I said, and I crawled out on my hands and knees to where he was lying. I tried to pull his skin off, but I was afraid the men of the other group who were still down by the road might happen to look toward us so I pulled LeRoy in behind the rocks. We stripped off his skin and Hilly put it on. "I still have to hold it," she said. "It's too big."

"At least it covers you," I said.

She looked at me strangely. "You seem awfully anxious to

have me covered. Am I so ugly?"

"All women should be covered," I told her, sternly.

She sighed and said, "I guess you're right," and we had no more time to talk about it because just then, LeRoy groaned and put his hands to his head and sat up.

We both stared at him and then I looked at Hilly. "You said you killed him!"

"I thought I did."

That's the way it is with women. You can never depend on them to do things right. But then, killing is a man's work, so I couldn't blame her too much. I said, "Well, he doesn't look very dead to me."

Hilly was apologetic—as she should have been. "I hit him with the rock as hard as I could. He must have the thickest skull in the whole group."

LeRoy groaned again. Then he opened his eyes. "My head hurts," he moaned and sat rocking back and forth for a minute. Then he looked down at himself and forgot about his head. "Somebody stole my skin!" he yelled. He looked around and saw Hilly. "You have it. Why did you steal my skin?"

"I needed it," Hilly said, "I was naked."

"Well, now I'm naked! Give it back!"

"We thought you were dead."

"Do I look dead? Give me my skin."

I said, "Be quiet or they'll hear you down by the road. Then you *will* be dead."

"I want my skin!" He was trying to cover himself with his hands and hold his head at the same time so he wasn't doing either very well.

I said, "You tried to kill me."

"What's that got to do with me having no skin to cover myself with?"

I picked up my club. "I ought to kill you. Then you wouldn't need any."

"You wouldn't kill one of your own group, would you?"

"Why shouldn't I? You deserve it!"

Hilly said, "This isn't getting us anywhere—you two fighting." She was mad and looked as though she was about ready to cry. "Here, I'll give you your old skin!" She started to take it off.

I didn't want her to stand naked in front of LeRoy. I said, "I'll get him one," and crawled out out from behind the ridge and hauled back one of the dead daub-faces. I took off his skin and gave it to

LeRoy. "Now are you satisfied?"

LeRoy turned away from Hilly and pulled the skin on. He was a very pouty youth. He said, "You'd think I didn't have a right to it. A skin to wear isn't much to ask." When he had it on he said, "I'm going back to the group." He spoke in a sullen voice as though he thought he wasn't wanted. He was right. He wasn't, and I would have been glad to see him go down to the road and get killed.

But Hilly said, "There isn't any group to go back to."

"What do you mean by that. Did they leave?"

"No. They aren't going anywhere. They're all dead. Look for yourself."

LeRoy looked over the rock and saw all the dead men down by the road and the daub-faces chasing our women and driving our cattle away. "We've got to stop them!" he said.

"You go down and stop them," I told him. "I'll wait here."

He waved his club and scowled and said, "You're a coward, Dan! You're afraid."

"I'm not a coward but I'm not a fool either."

"Will you stop wasting time?" Hilly said. "We've got no group to go to. We're all

alone. We've got to decide what to do."

She was right, but I was just going to say the same thing. I said, "All right. There isn't much use staying here, so let's go that way." I pointed behind us, away from the daub-face group.

"Where does that way lead to?" LeRoy asked.

"How do I know?"

"It doesn't seem very sensible to not know where you're going."

"Do you know any place we can go?"

"No."

"All right. Then don't talk so much."

Hilly pointed and said, "I think that's the way we ought to go. There are some hills over there we can hide in until we decide what to do."

I'd already seen the hills and thought the same thing so it was still my decision and I wasn't mad at Hilly for suggesting it. I said, "All right. We'll start now and see how far we can go before it gets dark."

"I'm hungry," LeRoy said. "What are we going to eat?"

"We'll find something, maybe," Hilly said. She had pulled LeRoy's skin up over her shoulders higher and fastened it with some strong twigs from a bush so she could walk

without holding it. I took her hand so she wouldn't fall over a rock or anything and we started out.

The ridge hid us from the daub-faced group and would hide us until we were far enough away so they couldn't catch us. But we were careful just the same. We went fast and kept looking back.

Finally we stopped to rest and LeRoy said, "I wish we'd hacked a leg off one of those dead daub-faces and brought it along. We may not find anything."

Hilly said, "Why that's horrible! People haven't eaten each other for—for years and years. It's a terrible thing!"

"If you get hungry enough it isn't so bad," LeRoy said. "And I'm pretty hungry." He was looking at Hilly's legs. I was pretty sure he wasn't thinking about eating them though.

Hilly said, "It's a funny feeling, isn't it?"

"What feeling?" I asked.

"To be all alone. To be running away and not know where we're going. We ought to be afraid."

"Are you afraid?"

"I—I don't think so. I used to wonder what it would be like to go off by myself."

"That would have been a

silly thing to do," LeRoy said. "Anyone who strays away from the group would be killed by men from another group."

Hilly looked at me. "Do you think we'll be killed?"

"I'll protect you. We'll hide and stay out of the way of any other group."

"What if we meet a Scout?"

That scared me but I didn't want to show it. "I'll kill any Scout we meet."

LeRoy laughed. "If you saw a Scout you'd run like a woman!"

I grabbed my club and started to swing it at him, but Hilly grabbed my arm and said, "We mustn't fight among ourselves! You know the Law. We're still a part of the group."

I realized she was right, but I was still in a rage at LeRoy. I said, "Why don't you go away? Why don't you go off by yourself and start a new group?"

He was gripping his club and scowling at me. Hilly said, "We've got to stick together. Now stop fighting and make up. What's the use of running away from other groups if we're going to kill each other? That doesn't make very good sense."

"Well, all right, but LeRoy better watch what he says."



We started walking again and came to a creek around the middle of the afternoon. The water was good, but it didn't help our hunger any, so we kept on going. LeRoy complained all the time and if it hadn't been for what Hilly said about obeying the Law, I would have killed him and had it over with.

Just before dusk, we had some luck when a big rabbit popped up from behind a rock and sat looking at us. LeRoy threw his club, but he missed by several feet. The rabbit ran a few feet and stopped and I threw my club. I'd have hit it, but my shoulder was sore which ruined my aim.

Then Hilly picked up a rock and threw it and hit the rabbit square in the head. It was the wildest kind of luck, because a woman just can't throw straight. Then too, a rock is easier to throw than a club.

Anyhow, we got the rabbit. Nobody felt like building a fire, so we tore it apart and ate it raw and it was very good. LeRoy finished his and rubbed his stomach and said, "Now I'm thirsty again." That was the trouble with LeRoy. Always complaining. Never satisfied. He disgusted me.

After eating we began walking again toward some trees we could see ahead of us and got to them after dark. While LeRoy was snooping around in the bushes, I told Hilly, "I'll have to stay awake all night. If I don't, LeRoy will sneak up and kill me."

Hilly said, "I wouldn't worry about that. Things have changed now. We're the only group LeRoy has and he'd be scared to death out here alone."

Maybe that was true and maybe it wasn't but I didn't intend to take any chances. When LeRoy came back, I said, "You go over on the other side of the grove and sleep there."

He scowled. "Why do I have to do that?"

"Because I don't want you around, that's all."

"I guess I can stay around if I want to."

I picked up my club. "Try it and see what happens."

He looked at the club and then at me and said, "Don't think you're scaring me any. I don't want to sleep near you either. You'd probably kill me as soon as I closed my eyes." He looked at Hilly. "Where's she going to sleep."

"That's her business."

He went pouting off into

the grove and I sat down with my back to a tree.

Hilly said, "You're not really going to stay awake all night, are you?"

"Of course I am. You think I want to get killed?"

She said, "That's silly."

"It's silly wanting to stay alive?"

She shrugged and looked around and found a pocket of soft grass and lay down in it. "I'm going to sleep," she said.

I sat with my back to the tree for a long time, listening for LeRoy's footsteps. I was sure he'd come sneaking up before long. But everything stayed quiet. I almost fell asleep twice, but I caught myself both times.

Then I got to worrying about Hilly lying there without any sleeping furs. If she got sick from being cold I might have to carry her and I didn't want to do that. So I got up and went over to her and said, "Aren't you cold lying there with nothing to keep you warm?"

She said, "No, I'm all right."

I said, "You may think you are but you might get cold after you go to sleep."

"I don't think so."

"I'm the best judge of that, so I'm going to lie down beside you and keep you warm."

I lay down on the grass beside her and though she wouldn't admit it, she *was* cold, because after a little while she came close to me and I put my arms around her so she could get warmth from my body.

She went right to sleep while I did my best to stay awake. I was very tired, though, because some time later, I heard footsteps and I knew LeRoy had come to kill me. But I'd dropped off to sleep and I couldn't make myself wake up enough to do anything about it. The next thing I heard was Hilly's voice. "Are you two going to sleep all day?"

I opened my eyes and found myself lying on the ground all tangled up with LeRoy. I jumped to my feet, very angry, and said, "Where did he come from?"

"He came over to sleep with us. He was cold, I guess, just like you were."

"I was not cold. I wanted to keep you warm!"

"Well, it doesn't matter one way or the other, does it? We all kept warm."

LeRoy grunted and opened his eyes and said, "Where did you get the rabbit?"

He was looking at the fat rabbit Hilly was carrying by its ears. Trust LeRoy to see

that first. All he was interested in was sleeping and eating.

"I just killed it," Hilly said. "And I found a creek over beyond the grove."

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I demanded.

But Hilly didn't seem to hear me. She looked worried. "And I found something else, too."

"What?"

"Come on over and look. Then we'd better eat and get away from this place."

LeRoy got up and we both followed Hilly across the grove to the other side. She didn't have to point out what she had been talking about. We could see it over beyond a level plains covered with rocks and small bushes.

A city.

We stood there looking for a long time. It was the first chance any of us had ever had to see a city. No one in our group had ever seen one except the Scouts and maybe the Leader. When the Scouts found one, they always led the group far out around it because that was part of the Law—that no member of the group ever went near a city.

It was a strange looking place all right. A very big pile of broken stones. It made me think that somebody had got-

ten a lot of broken rocks from the roads together and put them in one place. They hadn't though, because a lot of the broken rocks in the city were much too big to have come from the roads.

"We better get out of here," LeRoy said.

Hilly said, "There's something else," and she pointed over to one side of the city to where there was a flat, open plain. There were three things on the plain—things that none of us had ever seen before. They looked a little like men, but they were not men I was sure. They were hanging from some kind of framework.

"What are they?" LeRoy asked.

I said, "How do I know what they are. They're too far away to tell."

"I'd just as soon not know," LeRoy said. "All I want to do is go the other way as fast as I can."

This showed what a coward LeRoy really was and I couldn't let Hilly think I was the same way, so I said. "Well, I'm not. I want to see what those things are. I'm going over there."

Hilly's eyes widened as she looked at me. I'd never seen an expression like that on her

face before. I liked it and I wanted it to stay there, so I said, "And another thing. I don't think cities are as dangerous as the Leaders say they are. I'm going over and see what's in a city."

LeRoy's eyes popped. "Are you crazy?"

"No, and I'm not a coward, either."

"Well, don't think I'm going along to protect you. I'll stay right here and wait until you come back all covered with sores. Then I'll watch you die."

I was scared. I wished I hadn't said I'd go to the city. But it was out and I'd have rather died than back down. I didn't want to die with sores all over me, though. I looked at Hilly, hoping she'd talk me out of it.

But that funny look was still on her face and she said, "I'll go with you anywhere you want to go, Dan."

She was certainly a big help, I thought. That's the trouble with women, you can never depend on them to do what you want them to. I tried to think of a way to back out, but I couldn't, so I said, "Come on then, let's go."

I walked out of the grove and started across the plain. I hoped that when we started, Hilly would lose her nerve.

But she was right there beside me, staring up at me as though she couldn't be happier. Women, I decided, just haven't the sense to be scared.

LeRoy stayed where he was. I looked back and saw him sitting against a tree. I turned and yelled, "You'll starve to death without Hilly to kill rabbits for you."

He didn't answer me. He just sat there. LeRoy was the kind who had no shame at all.

We walked for a long time and pretty soon the things hanging from the sticks were close enough to see. Hilly said, "They *do* look like men."

"They aren't though," I said. Where did you ever see a man with a head that round—or that big?"

"But they've got arms and legs."

We were close now and we walked slower. Nothing happened. They didn't jump down and chase us. They didn't do anything. They just hung there and then I could see that they weren't alive.

"They *are* men," Hilly whispered.

"They're wearing very strange skins. Someone hung them up here and they died." Their skins were of strange material and were torn and frayed from the wind and

rain—from hanging so long. They had something on over their heads—the big round balloon things. “Why would anybody wear skins like that?”

Hilly said, “Maybe they’re from a group we don’t know anything about and they made those skins to scare anybody they met from another group.”

“Maybe that’s true,” I said, “but it didn’t work. Some group caught them and hung them up here to die.”

“There are groups that are very cruel and do things like that. I’ve heard the Leader and the Scouts talk about them. The Scouts always try to avoid them because they don’t just kill and get it over with. They take a long time and do it in—in horrible ways.”

“I’d like to find some men from that group. I’d hang them up the same way they hung these men.”

I was holding Hilly’s hand and I felt it tighten. I looked at her and she said, “Dan. Why do groups always fight? Why do they kill each other all the time?”

It was the silliest question I’d ever heard, and it didn’t sound like Hilly at all. I said, “What else is there to do? If we didn’t kill the men of other

groups, they’d kill us. You know that.”

“Yes, but what if some-time, instead of fighting, two groups just sat down and talked to each other?”

“Talk? What would there be to talk about?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Killing all the time seems so—so useless.”

“You’re just tired,” I said, “or you wouldn’t think of such silly things. Maybe we’d better go back to the grove and not go to the city until tomorrow.”

“Let’s go now. Let’s get it over with.”

“All right. If you really want to.”

“You’re the one who wanted to.”

“Then let’s go!”

We started walking again, slower now, but the city seemed to come closer awfully fast. I held tight to Hilly’s hand and we were walking on tiptoe when we came to the first stones.

“Do you feel anything?” Hilly asked.

“Feel what?”

“I don’t know. I thought maybe we’d feel what causes the sores.”

I thought I felt a little pain on my left arm and then my cheek began to itch. I touched the first stone we came to. “It

doesn't feel any different from the stone on the road."

Hilly was looking ahead into the city. "A lot of them are different, though. Look at the shiny ones."

"A city is certainly a strange place."

"I don't see anything dangerous, though."

We went in among the rocks. There were open places we could walk through. We went very slowly, but nobody tried to stop us and there didn't seem to be anything dangerous. So we kept going and pretty soon we were a long way inside the city.

Hilly said, "Whatever it is that hurts people doesn't hurt rabbits."

"How do you know?"

"Because there's one sitting on that stone. If it was dangerous a rabbit wouldn't stay around."

I looked and saw him, sitting up on a broken stone, his eyes on us. "I'm hungry," I said.

Hilly picked up a small stone and aimed it. I said, "Let me do that. The man is supposed to get the food."

"You'd miss," Hilly said and threw the stone and knocked the rabbit end over end.

I took the fur off the rabbit

and we sat down on a stone to eat it. We didn't talk for a while and things were very quiet. When we were about half through, Hilly stopped suddenly and raised her head. "I think there's somebody out there!"

I stopped eating and listened. "I don't hear anybody. Where?"

"Behind us. Back where we came from."

Hilly was scared and I didn't feel very brave myself. I listened hard and then I heard it too. Somebody walking; walking as though they were trying to be quiet about it. I put down my meat because I wasn't hungry any more. Who could be following us in a city where nobody ever came?

Then I remembered. "It's LeRoy," I said. "Who else could it be?"

Hilly wasn't convinced. "Well—maybe."

"He got scared of being alone and followed us." I climbed up on top of the big stone and yelled, "LeRoy! Come on out! Quit sneaking along behind us!"

It was very quiet for a minute. Then we heard the footsteps again, coming closer, and we saw who it was.

Not LeRoy at all, but a tall, yellow-haired man in strange

skins, carrying a very short thing in his hand that couldn't have been a knife or a club or anything else I'd ever seen.

He came through an open place in the rocks and stood looking at us, holding the thing out in front of him. I grabbed my club and charged at him, deciding I'd better kill him quick before any more men from his group came to help him.

But I didn't kill him. I never even got to him, because a strange and terrible thing happened. He did something to the thing he was holding and blue fire came from one end of it. It made a kind of snake noise and a big stone beside me turned blue and red and began melting away. The heat that made the stone melt must have come from the thing in the man's hand. That was the only way to explain it.

The stone sizzled like cooking meat and I jumped away as it burned my arm. I dropped my club and turned and grabbed Hilly's hand and we ran.

We didn't know where we were going and we didn't care because both of us were so scared we couldn't think anymore. We just wanted to get away from the man and the

thing in his hand and the burning rock.

As we ran, I looked back, and the man was following us. But not running. He walked slowly, not trying to catch us and not caring whether we ran away or not. This scared me even more because it meant there were others of his group around and he evidently knew they would catch and kill us.

There was nothing we could do but run, though, so we did. Down the path ahead through the broken rocks. Then, suddenly the rocks ended and we ran out into a big open space that was more terrible than anything I'd ever seen. We were going so fast, we couldn't stop and before we knew it we were out in this open space, right in among a whole group wearing the strange skins the yellow-haired man wore.

And there was something else. A big, shining thing with doors in it, right in the middle of the open space. I didn't know what it was and I didn't care. I only knew we'd been trapped and were going to be killed and I didn't even have a club to kill back with.

I held onto Hilly's hand and turned to run back into the rocks, but the men of the group were very fast and be-

fore we could get away, they got their hands on both of us.

I fought with my fists and my feet and I saw Hilly was fighting too. She bit one of the men who were trying to hold her and he jumped away and put his hand in his mouth. But the others held her, even though she twisted and fought so hard that her skin came off.

There were four men holding me and I wondered why they didn't kill me. Then I knew. This was one of the groups I'd heard about who killed slowly for fun; who liked to hurt the men of other groups. I didn't want to be hurt so I kept on fighting but pretty soon they had both of us down so we couldn't move.

They didn't try to kill us. They just held us there and then three people, two men and a woman came out of the thing with doors and walked over to where we were. Also, the yellow-haired Scout who had followed us, came from among the rocks and grinned at us. He said, "It worked. I knew damn well some of them would come back to the scene of the crime. God! They really *are* animals!"

The woman said, "I'm ashamed of you, Rex. They're human beings."

The yellow-haired man scowled. "You saw what they did to the men of the advance unit—"

"How do you know these two had anything to do with it?" She seemed to be the Leader, or at least she acted the way a Leader would act. She looked at the men who were holding Hilly and said, "For heaven's sake! Put that child's clothes on. What kind of a spectacle is this?"

One of the men said, "Maybe you'd like to try. She practically stripped herself and if we let go of her, she'll set her teeth into one of us and hold on."

The woman went over and knelt down beside Hilly and smiled. "We aren't going to hurt you, dear. We only want to ask you some questions. Can you understand that?"

"Go ahead and kill us," Hilly said. "Get it over with."

"But we aren't going to kill you. Why should we?"

"What group are you from?"

"What group? I don't—"

"What are you doing here in a city? You must know cities are forbidden by the Law."

I was proud of Hilly. Even with death waiting for us, she was not afraid. The woman



Leader glanced up and one of the men said, "The radiation probably. They've learned to stay away from contaminated areas."

The woman Leader had pulled Hilly's fur up over her. She put her hand on Hilly's head and said, "This city is no longer contaminated. That is, it—"

"You don't get sores?" Hilly asked.

"That's right. All the poison in the air that makes sores is gone. It's gone from most of the cities. That's why we came back. And we want to be your friends."

"That's silly."

"Why is it silly, dear?"

"Groups are never friends with each other. Groups always fight and kill each other."

"Don't you think that's rather foolish?"

Hilly looked at her strangely. "How are you going to kill us?"

"We're *not* going to kill you. We want to give you something to eat. We want to be your friends. If these men let you up will you promise not to fight us, or run away?" She turned and looked at me when she said that to show she meant both of us.

I said, "I'll fight as soon as I can get a hold of a rock or

a club. I'll kill one of you if I can before you kill us."

One of the men laughed. "Human beings, did you say?"

The woman Leader bit her lip. "At least, they're honest in their intentions. Bring them into the ship. We'll feed them and maybe they'll quiet down."

The men who were holding us picked us up and carried us toward the thing with doors. The woman Leader had called it a ship so I guess that's what it was. They carried us in through a door and down a long, shining lane where they opened another door and we were in a very small place with no way out except the way we came in.

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay in this room until we can come to some kind of an understanding," the woman Leader said. "And now, if you'll promise not to fight with me, I'll have some food brought in and the three of us will sit down and talk."

One of the men said, "Lorna! You can't stay in here with these savages. They'll tear you limb from limb!"

The woman Leader smiled at us. "You two must be pretty hungry. Wouldn't you like to sit down and eat?"

We'd had the rabbit—or part of it—but I was still hungry. I looked at Hilly. "I think you ought to have something to eat," I said.

Hilly stared at the woman Leader and then said, "All right. We won't try to kill you."

"That's fine, but won't you call me Lorna? That's my name." She turned to the men. "Send in something to eat. And go away. I'm perfectly safe."

The men didn't like it but from the way they acted, you could see that Lorna was really the Leader. They went away and pretty soon a man came back with a lot of food—many different kinds in shining dishes. We tasted some of them while Lorna sat and watched us, smiling, and then we ate until we couldn't hold any more.

When we couldn't eat any more, Lorna said, "Please tell me about yourselves. What are you two doing here all alone. Where are your parents?"

I wasn't going to tell her anything, but Hilly said, "They're dead and dragged away by the other group—the one we fought with." And pretty soon she'd told Lorna

all about what had happened.

Lorna thought for a while and then asked, "Do either of you know why this city is—like this—a ruin? Do either of you know what happened?"

Hilly shook her head and Lorna went on. "Well, a long time ago it was a huge, beautiful place where people lived—your ancestors and mine. But they fought among themselves—one nation made war on another and they devised weapons that were so terrible that civilization was wiped out in one final war."

"Civilization? I never heard of that," I said.

"The way people lived—the culture they had."

I didn't know what culture was either but I didn't say anything and Lorna went on. "There were a few people who saw this great war coming. They knew what would happen—that after the war, the whole earth would be poisoned so that no one could live on it. Some of the bombs they made did things to the air so that people died instantly or got foul sores on their bodies and died slowly and horribly."

"That's why people from the groups who came to the cities died from sores?"

"That's right. The poison stayed in the air for hundreds and hundreds of years."

"Then why didn't all the people die?"

"That's the strange thing we've discovered; that it's impossible to kill all the people. After the war was over some of the people must have survived the poison and the annihilation. They began breeding again and went on with life—but without knowledge or perhaps even the memory of what earth was like before the war."

"Where did you come from?" Hilly asked.

"These people I was telling you about, who foresaw the war, had means of traveling into space. This ship that we are in now came clear from the moon where these people went to escape the destruction of the great war. We built places to live on the moon, under glass domes, and there we waited until the poisons had vanished from the earth. It was a very long wait, but now the contamination is almost gone."

I'd seen the moon lots of times, but I thought she was lying. Nobody could live there. And if they could, how could they come down here? It was silly.

"We sent an advance ship to test for radiation. When they didn't return we came

down to investigate and found them hanging out there on the prairie." Lorna looked at us sharply. "Your people didn't kill them did they?"

Hilly said, "No. It was some other group. We don't know who did it."

"We probably would have, though," I said.

Lorna looked at me. "Why?"

"Why not? Groups always kill each other. It—it just isn't sensible any other way." It seemed to me she was stupid to have to ask.

She stared at the wall for a long time and then said, "The poison we knew about has vanished, but we find another and more terrible kind. The very precepts of living have been reversed. *Blessed are the meek* has been changed to *Blessed are the murderous*. This new poison may take even longer to eradicate." She didn't seem to be talking to us—just talking. Now she looked at us and said, "Would you like to come with me and learn a new kind of life? See the big cities on the moon under great plastic bubbles?"

"What kind of a life?" Hilly asked.

"The only good kind, child. Where people help their neighbor instead of killing

him. Where everyone lives together in peace."

"I think I'd like that," Hilly said, gravely.

I couldn't believe what I heard. Hilly saying that? Swallowing all those lies? I was so surprised I couldn't think of anything to say.

Lorna smiled and said, "You two must be rather tired." She looked at us doubtfully. "Are you—married?"

I said, "No, but I made my kill, so we can be."

"Your kill?"

"I killed more than one in the fight yesterday."

"But now you're going to learn that killing is wrong," she said gently.

I wasn't going to do that at all, but I didn't say anything.

"Come with me," Lorna said. She opened the place we were in and we followed her out. "Down this hall. Your rooms are opposite each other. Through these doors."

She opened a door and Hilly went in and she closed it after her. Then she opened a door for me and I went in. "There is your bed," she told me. "You can sleep as long as you care to."

I lay down on the bed but I didn't intend to sleep. I was only waiting. I went to sleep anyhow, though, and when I woke up I went out into the

hall and everything was very quiet. I slipped into Hilly's room and woke her up. "Let's get out of here before they kill us," I said.

Hilly rubbed her eyes and said, "They aren't going to kill us. They're taking us to the moon where we can see the great cities."

"That's a lie! Everything she told us was lies. Get up and let's get out of here!"

"I don't want to go, Dan!"

I couldn't believe my ears! Hilly wanted to stay with these people. It made me mad and I wanted to hit her. But I didn't. I said, "All right. If you want to stay here and listen to their lies and probably get killed, then you go right ahead! I'm getting out of here if I can."

Hilly put her hand on my arm and I thought she was going to cry. "Please, Dan! I'm sure they aren't lying. I'm sure Lorna means what she says—that there are places where people don't go around killing each other all the time—where they live together in peace and are friends."

"But you said yourself that there's nothing to do but kill the people of other groups or they'll kill us."

"I know I said that but after talking to Lorna—lis-

tening to her—I'm not so sure."

I said, "All right. If you don't want to go, I can't make you. Good-bye."

"You're—you're going?"

"Yes—back where I belong."

It was dark now and everything was quiet. There was a man standing by the entrance—evidently a guard. Just inside the entrance, there was a long, thin metal thing on a table. There was some kind of a flower in the thing. I took the flower out and hit the guard with the metal thing.

I went on out into the clearing and nobody was around to stop me. I got out among the stones and there I was safe. Or I thought I was. But while I was winding through the rocks, I looked back and saw a shadow of something moving. They'd found the guard and were after me. I still had the club I'd hit him with, so I ducked behind a stone and waited. The shadow came closer and I raised the club and was just about to bring it down when the shadow cried out, "Dan—Dan—don't!"

It was Hilly.

I dropped the club and she came into my arms. She was crying. She said, "Dan—I

couldn't stay there without you. I got scared and I knew that I had to go with you."

We kissed. I wasn't supposed to kiss her until we were married, but I did it anyway. I said, "Don't cry. Things will be all right. Do you know what we've got to do?"

"What?"

"We've got to warn the groups about this new group that's come down from the moon. They've got to be told about the strange thing that melts rocks."

"Then you think they do come from the moon?"

"I can't think of any place else."

"But any group we go to will kill us."

"I don't think so—when they hear what I have to tell them. I think maybe all the groups will get together. After all. This is our land. If what they say is the truth, then they ran away from it and now they want it back so we have to fight."

"All right, Dan," Hilly said. "Whatever you say to do, I'll do. If you say kill the strange people, I'll help you."

I knew I was right, but Hilly agreeing with me made me feel strong and brave. We'd beat these new people. We'd kill them.

**THE END**



# Grandma Goes to Mars

By ROBERT BLOCH

*Grandma knew nothing of space ships, but she could run the pump back on the farm and the pilot was darn glad she could!*

I'M NOT saying it's true and I'm not saying it's false.

All I know is that Joe Saunders is the man who told me. And you wouldn't think he'd lie about a thing like that. Not Captain Joseph Saunders, the first man to ever set foot on the planet Mars—and the only man who has ever piloted three successful round trips.

After the last one, General Electronics threw a big homecoming banquet for him at the Waldorf-Astoria. It was a tremendous affair, but of course the whole idea was General

Electronics' baby. I guess everybody knows that, though.

Joe Saunders and three men made the first trip. Then he and the high brass made the second trip, a year later. Finally came this third expedition, testing an improved rocket with accommodations for twenty—a trip designed to prove that fullscale interplanetary flight was possible.

It couldn't have been more successful. The whole thing was over and done with in just under three weeks—no hitches, no problems, and everybody back safe and sound

in time for the big banquet and gala celebration.

Speaking for myself, I thought it was terrific. I got a big charge out of being toastmaster — introducing everybody from Joe Saunders himself way on down to the Vice President of the United States. The crowd had a good time. The TV cameras worked perfectly. The publicity was sensational.

And after it was all over, I went upstairs to the company suite and found Joe Saunders sitting on the bed, crying in his beer.

I mean exactly what I said. He sat there with his shoes off, cradling a case of beer on his lap, and he was crying. This obviously had been going on for quite some time now—he was on his sixth bottle.

"Hey," I said. "What's with the conquering hero?"

He just looked at me and sniffled. Captain Joseph Saunders, the greatest celebrity in the world, sniffled at me. "Lock the door," he sobbed. "And find me an opener, quick."

"Haven't you been using that doohickey behind the door?" I asked.

Joe Saunders stopped sniffing and glared. "Cut out that kind of talk," he said. "You sound like Grandma Perkins."

"So what's wrong with that?" I grinned at him. "Too bad she didn't stick around for the big banquet. But she said she had to get back home before her hens started to set. Funny old gal."

"Yeah." Saunders took a swig of beer. "Very funny."

"What's the matter? You sound as if you didn't much care for her?"

He sighed. "Oh, it's not her, exactly. You're the guy I really ought to kill. It was your idea that started everything."

"Started what?" I asked him.

And that's when he told me.

It all began with my contest. Yes, the contest was my idea, and a good one. Everybody thought so. "WIN A FREE TRIP TO MARS! JUST COMPLETE THIS STATEMENT IN 50 WORDS OR LESS. 'I LIKE GENERAL ELECTRONICS PRODUCTS BECAUSE'—"

A natural, that's what it was, a natural. We got over two million entries. Don't ask me how they handled the job of selecting the winner. That was up to the judges. All I know is that the lucky party was a lady. Mrs. Hester Perkins, of Armadillo, Iowa.

General Electronics sent a private plane out to get her

at their expense. We were all waiting at the airport when she came in. The press was there, too, of course, and when she hopped out of the plane with the pilot, the bulbs went off and blinded us all for a good minute.

Then we could see, and I guess Joe Saunders summed up the general reaction pretty accurately. All he said was, "Oh, no!" but that was enough.

Hester Perkins was a little old lady with white hair and rimless glasses. She wore a black silk dress and a black hat with red cherries all over the top. And so help me, she carried a bag of knitting.

President Benson swallowed twice, took a deep breath, and walked over to her. "Permit me to introduce myself," he said. "I'm Thaddeus Benson, of General Electronics. And you, I presume, are Mrs. Hester Perkins?"

"That's right, young man." She beamed and held out her hand. "But you can call me Grandma. Everybody does. Where's the General?"

"General?"

"General Electronics. I thought he'd be down to meet me—"

The press closed in, and not a moment too soon. I thought Mr. Benson was going to flip

his very expensive toupee. He turned to Farley, the pilot. "What's the meaning of this? Why didn't you warn me?"

"But what could I do, Mr. Benson? My orders were to bring back the lady who won the contest. That's her, all right. And I might say, she's a good passenger. Never been up in a plane in her life but she took it calm, even when we ran into a storm over Cleveland. Just knitted away for dear life—she's finishing some doilies for her daughter-in-law, you know, and—"

"I don't want to know!" Benson groaned. "This is awful! Saunders, what are we going to do?"

Joe Saunders shrugged. "We'll have to talk her out of it," he said. "I'm not taking an old lady on any space-flight. Why, she's over sixty! Can you imagine us sitting around in the cabin for ten days each way, watching her knit doilies?"

"We'll talk her out of it," I said. "Offer her a cash award, something like that. Give the trip to the runner-up."

"That's right," Mr. Benson agreed. "Once she finds out what she's in for, she'll settle for cash."

But Grandma Perkins had other ideas.

We told her about the haz-



ards of the trip that night, and it didn't faze her a bit. We even showed her through the rocket and pointed out the cramped quarters, the limited accommodations.

"Why, I think everything is perfectly scrumptious," she told us. "You should see the farm, since Homer passed away! Not that I don't keep things tied up, but we ain't got furniture like this, nor all these doohickeys. What are them straps for?"

Joe Saunders told her about the straps. He explained about the takeoff and the 10-G pressure. He went on to describe how the ship was in free-fall for nine days each way, going and coming.

"Sounds real interesting," Grandma Perkins said. "I never get dizzy or nothing. Once at the Fair I went up in one of them Ferris Wheels and I liked it so much I rode twice. Homer, he thought twenty cents was a heap to pay, but—"

"Fifty thousand dollars, cash!" Mr. Benson said. "I forgot to tell you about that, didn't I? If you don't take the trip, there's an alternate prize of fifty thousand. Tax free."

Grandma Perkins laughed. "Lands sakes," she said. "I don't need money. Body gets

to be my age, what do they want with money? It's the experience that counts, I always say. You just keep that money in the bank, young man. Never can tell when it might come in handy."

"Dangerous," Joe Saunders said. "Very dangerous. And a woman your age—"

"My age? I'm only sixty-three, and I've never been sick a day in my life. 'Cepting when I had Martha and Homer Junior, of course. You just ask the doctor, he'll tell you how spry I am."

"That's just what we intend to do," Joe Saunders told her. "You'll have to get a complete physical examination. We certainly can't risk taking you without a medical okay."

"I'm in better shape than you are, young man," Grandma Perkins said. "You'll see."

We did, too. The first specialist couldn't find anything wrong, and neither could the second, nor the third. And by that time the publicity was out.

"Looks like we're stuck!" Benson groaned, when he told me the findings.

"Stuck?" I crowed. "Look at these headlines! I tell you, we couldn't have made a better choice if we planned it this way. The whole idea of a typical American grand-

mother taking a space-flight is just perfect. Did you see the editorials? All that stuff about Youth and Age, and Grandma Moses, and the pioneer spirit? We're not stuck!"

"No." Joe Saunders sighed. "You're not. But *I* am!"

And he was.

Of course all I know about the flight is what he told me there in the hotel room after the banquet. But that was enough. Nineteen men in the rocket, taking the 10-G pressure and then floating around or walking with weights, hanging on to straps from the sides and ceilings for nine days out. Nineteen men and Grandma Perkins.

Grandma Perkins didn't walk and she didn't hang. After she got used to the sensation, she spent most of her time floating. Joe said it was an awful thing to see her floating across the cabin, knitting away without missing a stitch.

"Got to get these doilies done before we get back," she said. "I promised." And then she'd look out of the port window. "Where are we now?"

I guess she drove the men crazy with her questions. Nineteen scientists and technologists, trapped in a cabin in space with one little old lady, and they couldn't escape.

"What's that doofunny over there?" and "How much gasoline you reckon it takes to keep this thing going?" and "What happened to all the blue in the sky?"

They answered her, of course, and that's what made them wild—because she didn't quite believe them. It was obvious she hadn't the faintest idea of how a rocket operates, or why. Saunders tried to give her a briefing on the elementary laws of physics and astronomy and the difficulties involved in going into space. He tried to impress her with the immensity of Space and the importance of the flight itself. But Grandma Perkins didn't impress very easily.

"Seems to me you could have figured out a way to keep that engine quiet," she sniffed. "Sounds just like the electric motor Homer put on my pump. Whenever it gets out of whack, I mean. There's a sort of doobiddy on it and I have to give it a lick with my hand to make it quiet down or the water just overflows. Seems to me you could have put a muffler or whatever on that engine."

"It isn't an engine," Saunders told her. "It's a space-drive." And he explained again, until she nodded and

floated away, smiling over her doily.

That's the way it went, for nine days. Nine days, with the men not daring to swear or even grumble. Not that they got much chance to get a word in edgewise. For Grandma Perkins was interested in conversation. She talked about her grandchildren, about the rations—"Call this cooking? Why, I turned out better meals on my old wood-stove back home!"—and about the best way to cure a cold. By the end of the first week the men were nervous. The thought of an approaching landing didn't lessen their tension. Finally, on the morning of the ninth day, Joe Saunders took over.

He issued instructions and told Grandma something about the landing problems. She didn't seem much impressed.

"All you mean is we strap ourselves down again, isn't that right, young man? So why tell me about those doo-jiggers of yours?"

"Just thought you'd be interested. After all, you must have some mechanical aptitude. You won the contest."

"Yes, that's right." Grandma Perkins sighed. "But what I really want to know is, will I have time to finish this here

doily before we get strapped down again?"

She had time. And after they landed, she was all ready to start on a fresh one. Saunders said she didn't even bother to look out of the observation port as they came down.

But they got her into an extra suit and gave her an oxygen tank and took her out with them. There wasn't much to see around Lacus Solis, of course, yet you'd think she'd be somewhat impressed. She was hooked up with Saunders on an intercom outfit, and he kept waiting for her to say something.

Instead, Grandma Perkins glanced around at the horizon for a moment, shrugged, and then stooped down.

"What are you doing?" Saunders asked.

"Just picking up some of these stones," she explained. "I promised Martha I'd bring some back for the children. Ain't likely to find much else by way of souvenirs from the looks of the place."

"But aren't you—well, impressed?" Saunders inquired.

"*Humph!* What's there to impress a body here? Can't breathe a bit of air, and there's no water. Just look at this soil! Why, you couldn't

even sow alfalfa and hope to get a crop."

Just then one of the crew signalled Joe and he had to go back to the ship. He left Grandma in the care of Stigmeir, one of the engineers. They stayed out for another hour, and then came back. Stigmeir joined the others, forward, and Saunders came to the cabin where Grandma Perkins sat alone.

She had taken off her suit and helmet, and Joe says he thought she must have been impressed after all, because he noticed she'd been crying.

"Kind of gets to you, doesn't it?" he said. "The grandeur of it all, and the loneliness. Which reminds me—"

"Loneliness?" Grandma snapped. "Who's lonely? If you must know, young man, I'm crying because I'm ashamed."

"Ashamed?"

"Yes. I'm ashamed of myself." She dabbed at her eyes with the hem of an unfinished doily, then glanced carefully around the cabin. "You're sure we're alone?"

Saunders nodded. "They're all up front. I must tell you—"

"I must tell *you*." Grandma leaned forward. "Young man, I did an awful thing. You

been so good to me, all you people, taking me on this trip and everything, and I can't help it. I got to tell somebody before I bust. I won this contest under false pretenses."

"False pretenses? You mean you didn't write—?"

"Oh, I wrote the hundred words myself, all right. But what I said just wasn't true. I mean, I really don't know anything about them new-fangled General Electronics gadgets. I never owned a one of 'em, couldn't abide having them in my house! Outside of the old radio, and the motor on the pump, there isn't a doohunkus in the place. And me fibbing about how wonderful they all are, and how I enjoy having such things!"

For a moment she sat there, looking very little and very old. Joe Saunders reached out and put his hand on her shoulder. "That's all right," he said. "It doesn't matter, now."

"But it *does*! Me, fooling all you big scientists—"

Saunders sighed. "Big scientists!" he said. "That's a laugh. You know what I came here to tell you? It seems that we big scientists have run into some trouble. We planned on taking off tomorrow, but something's gone wrong."

"You mean, with the engine?"

"The space-drive. I had Watkins test, and it doesn't respond. We checked the fueling mechanism and there's nothing wrong—but it won't start."

"Can't you send out for—" Grandma hesitated, and Saunders could see that she understood. "You mean—?"

He nodded. "I mean we have food and oxygen here for the nine-day return trip, plus an extra three days. Say two weeks at most, if we ration everything. And after that—" Saunders turned and stared out at the bleak plains of Mars.

"So you've got to fix the whatchamacallit by tomorrow or the next day if we're going to get back, is that it?"

"That's it." He turned and gave her a wry smile. "Apparently you aren't the only one travelling under false pretenses. We thought we knew our way around. But now, it looks as though it doesn't matter. Unless we can figure out the trouble, fast."

Then he went forward. He was forward all that day, and the next. The men slept in shifts, and they didn't say much—to Grandma or to each other. They checked and rechecked, cursing the lack of tools, cursing the impenetrable housing of the drive that pre-

vented them from stripping it down or reaching the source of the powerhead. And *they* stared out of the port, too.

Finally they got the drive to turn over, but the instruments stayed dead. The transmission and feeder mechanism was shot. This was on the third day, the last.

They went back to the cabin, then, with their micrometers and their testing instruments and their delicate probes, and they sat down while Joe Saunders paced the narrow aisle between the bunks.

"Well, it looks like this is it," he said. "There's nothing more we can do."

Nobody said anything. Nobody, that is, but Grandma. "Lands sakes!" she murmured. "And me with the whole set of doilies almost finished." She cocked her head. "You fellows sure you tried everything?"

"Of course we're sure." Saunders clenched his fists. "Do you think we're anxious to stay here and die?"

"But the engine's running. I can hear it myself."

"It runs, yes. But the transmission—the induction coils—oh, what's the use?" Saunders turned on his heel, then halted.

"Hey," he called. "Where

do you think you're going?"

"Up to take a look for myself," Grandma Perkins said. "Want to come along?"

A half-hour later, they took off for earth.

"So that's how it was," Saunders told me, as he opened his eighth bottle of beer. "In half an hour we were on our way. And we didn't have a bit of trouble during the whole nine days. Of course, most of the boys talked about resigning once they got back, and I've got a good notion to turn in my card myself. None of us could look Grandma Perkins in the face. But I've got to hand it to her. She just sat there, knitting away, strapped in most of the time because she'd started some new embroidery and claimed she couldn't get it right while she floated."

"Let me get this straight," I said. "You mean she fixed the space-drive for you?"

"Of course she did. And that's what's so awful about the whole thing. If it ever gets out we'll be the laughing-stock of the scientific world."

"But she didn't know anything about it," I said. "You told me she didn't. So what could she do?"

"What could she do?" Joe Saunders sighed, then grinned. "You remember how she kept comparing that space-drive to the electric motor on her pump back at the farm? Well, I took her in to see it and she listened for a minute, and then she did just what she did when that pump of hers gets out of order. And it worked."

"You mean—?"

"That's right." Joe Saunders raised his beer and uttered a great sob. "There happens to be a little doohickey on top of the dingus. And Grandma Perkins just lifted her skirts and kicked it."

**THE END**



## **SET 'EM UP!**

Our prehistoric ancestors must have done plenty of staggering from their equivalent of today's bars. Research shows that beer was a popular beverage even 10,000 years ago.



## Lorelei of Chaos

By RUSS WINTERBOTTOM

*She wasn't a bad girl. She caused murder and bloodshed and annihilated two men by merely being alive and lovely.*

THE man looked human. He had a stiff-legged walk and he was dressed in a coarse matted cloth that looked as if it had been woven from plant fibre. The garment, like a cape or a toga, was draped loosely over his body and hung almost to his knees. As he came near, the two spacemen could see that he was bald, except for a few gray hairs on his temples, and that he wore sandal-like

wooden shoes on his feet.

Ronnie Lasholder pushed his pistol back into its holster. "He isn't armed," he said. "See if you can make him understand that our fuel reactor conked and we stopped here to fix it."

"I doubt if he ever heard of a space ship," said Thad. "But I'll try."

"I understand," said the man. "I came here to help you."

He extended his hand toward Thad. For an instant the young man hesitated. Thad always had to think things over, but he had a fairly nice brain to think with. The miracle brain, Ronnie called it. And Thad Cascan usually came up with the right answer. Thad grasped the hand and was surprised at its hardness. The skin was like hard rubber, yet the fingers flexed easily about Thad's. The warmth in the hand was strange too. It wasn't the warm, moist heat of living flesh, but rather the dry radiation of a thermo-unit.

Again the man spoke. "My name is Destiny."

Thad jerked a look into the man's eyes as he spoke. They were expressionless.

"I'm Thad Cascan," said the young man. He stood aside while Ronnie took the hand. "This is Ronnie Lasholder. Give us a hand and we might be able to help *you*."

The man called Destiny seemed to sense Thad's thoughts. "I do not wish to be rescued. The only inconvenience is solitude, but we can cope with that."

"We?" Ronnie asked.

"There is one other being here," said Destiny. He pointed to the opening in the trees,

from which he had come a moment before. As he spoke, Thad saw movement through the leaves and a moment later something small, lithe and graceful emerged in the clearing.

"Migawd," said Ronnie. "A woman!"

The girl came shyly toward them. She extended her hand to Thad. "I'm Karin O'Hara," she said.

Ronnie gasped. "You can't be," he said. He remembered the name and this couldn't be the person. Karin had disappeared more than twenty-five years ago. This girl couldn't be twenty-five, possibly she was twenty. Dark-haired, brown-eyed, beautiful. Like Destiny, she was dressed in a fibre garment but hers seemed to dance with biological geometry as it draped from her shoulders to her thighs.

"Not the great woman scientist of Terra," said Thad. He remembered reading about Karin O'Hara in history books. Karin had made some of the first interstellar flights from the solar system. She had traveled to Sirius, Proxima and Alpha Centauri. The books had called her the Amelia Earhart of space and her career had ended as mysteriously as that



of her namesake. Karin O'Hara had simply vanished. No one knew how or where, but no one could forget her.

"I'm her daughter," said the girl. "Mother died five years ago."

Thad's eyes shifted to Destiny who had stood like a statue while the girl took the hands of the earthlings. "Your father?" Thad asked.

Karin smiled. "Hardly," she said. "Destiny is not quite human."

"What in the blazes is he?" Ronnie asked. "He looks human—certainly his origins are terrestrial."

"Mother built him," said Karin. "You see, he's a robot." She paused. "We needed a man on this planet—Verdan she called it, because it was green. So she built Destiny."

Thad blinked his blue eyes. Ronnie scratched his blond head reflectively. "Something doesn't add up. No men . . . yet you—"

"Mother also discovered the secret of parthenogenesis," said Karin. "It is possible in lower animals, even rabbits. But Karin O'Hara had a child without a father—I am that child."

"Migawd," said Ronnie, "it's the end of man."

"As in all cases of parthe-

nogenesis, the child is a daughter. So a world without men seemed necessary. Mother had to build Destiny to remember what a man was like." Karin smiled at the robot. "Destiny is very human. As near human as a machine can be. He thinks, he speaks, he walks. He has feelings and emotions. He can see and he has a good memory. But still, he is a machine. That is why I am happy that men have finally come, at long last, to Verdan."

Thad looked at Ronnie. "I guess we'll stay awhile," he said.

"Good." Karin took Thad's hand. "I have a nice little house in the forest. Come, let us dine."

"I shall fix the space ship," said Destiny.

Thad and Ronnie told her about themselves, the planets they had visited, the universes they had traveled. She listened intently, and asked questions—sensible questions, for her mother had told her about space flight.

"I've learned much about terrestrial traditions and customs," she told them. "Destiny is a great teacher. But now problems will increase. It is too bad that two men came to Verdan instead of

one. Polyandry would never be successful, I'm afraid."

Thad turned to Ronnie and for a moment the two men searched each other's eyes. For ten years, they'd sailed together through space. They had been friends, constant companions. Neither had had a secret from the other, and no man could ask for a better friend than they had in each other. But now that friendship was in a delicate balance. There was only one girl, and as she had said, Polyandry was not a successful institution.

"What makes men go from one world to another?" Karin asked.

"We're fortune hunters," said Thad.

Karin's eyes fell. "There is no fortune here, I'm afraid."

Ronnie's eyes darted to Thad's. Thad nodded his head. "There is wealth beyond dreams," said Thad.

"This is what we've been missing," said Ronnie. "A nice girl."

Early the next day, Destiny had finished making repairs on the space ship. It was a simple operation, one that could have been done in space, except that Verdan had looked attractive and Thad and Ronnie had decid-

ed to land, just to feel natural gravity again.

Destiny reported to Thad who was in the little log bungalow that Karin used for a home. Ronnie was sleeping and Karin was collecting food for the noon-day meal.

"Your ship is ready to sail at your convenience," said Destiny.

"We're not leaving for awhile," said Thad. "Then one of us will leave and the other will stay, I'm afraid."

Destiny nodded his head. "I understand," he said. "It is a strange situation. Two men who have been friends, must lose that friendship over a woman they've never seen until one day ago. I would not be surprised if you fought over her, as if she were the only woman in the universe."

"For me, maybe she is," said Thad.

"Ronnie feels that way too," Destiny replied. "You both have wisdom of sorts and stupidity besides. You seek wealth. Karin represents the wealth of this planet and so you both must have her. Other wealth is divisible, but Karin is not."

"Let's look at it this way," said Thad, "to Karin, Ronnie and I are wealth—two kinds of wealth. I'll admit that between us there's not

much choice. Ronnie's better looking, but I've got more brains. Brains might come in handy on a lonely world. If Karin's smart, she'll pick me. I'm more desirable wealth."

"Karin's mother discovered that men are not necessary," said Destiny. "Therefore you are not wealth in any sense."

The robot rose and walked stiff-legged out of the door.

A few moments later Ronnie rose from his bunk. He stretched and yawned and then got slowly to his feet. "I've been dreaming," he said.

"So what?" Thad asked.

"So we've got to settle some things. We've always settled things before, so let's settle this. One of us takes the space ship home, the other stays."

Thad nodded. "I don't intend to lose, Ronnie. I'd rather die than lose. So if you win, you get the space ship *and* Karin."

Ronnie thought for a moment. "Funny thing," he said, "I feel the same way. Maybe it's my glands, maybe I really don't think that way at all. I'd hate to kill you, pal."

"Yeah, Ronnie, it's your glands. Remember the good old Earth is full of gals, lots of 'em as pretty as Karin.

Why should we kill each other over a pretty girl? Take the ship and all the wealth that's aboard and go home. Leave me to my foolishness."

Ronnie blinked. "Why don't *you* take the ship and my share of the wealth? I'll trade everything I've got for Karin."

"It's a bad trade, my friend." Thad took a step toward Ronnie. "I hate to do this, but it's for your own good. To me, nothing means anything but Karin."

But Thad had talked too long. Before he finished, Ronnie had swung. It was a wild swing, but it was powerful. It caught Thad on the side of the jaw. Had it been less wild, the argument would have ended there. But Thad had managed to jerk his head just in time to avoid its full force and he remained awake. And then they fought.

Ronnie was aggressive, powerful, determined. Thad was skillful, scientific, a boxer rather than a fighter. Ronnie slugged, but Thad avoided. Thad tapped, and Ronnie took, for Thad's blows fell like raindrops on a mountain, while Ronnie struck with the fury of a hurricane beating against a grass hut. But Thad was no grass hut—he

bent with the wind, rather like a palm tree, or the grass the hut was made of.

They bowled over furniture that had been fashioned by the great woman explorer of space. They broke the mirror that she had rescued first, above all things from her ship when it crashed twenty-five years ago. They slugged, tapped, boxed and slashed.

So intent were the two men on their battle, that they did not hear the noiseless walk of a stiff-legged figure who entered the room.

Destiny watched them fighting. He stooped, picked up a broken bit of furniture and deliberately struck Ronnie over the head. As Ron-

nie's knees buckled, and Thad watched his friend fall, unbelieving as he watched that his blows had caused all this. Destiny struck again. This time Thad went down.

An hour later a great space ship lurched upward from Verdan. Its controls were automatic, for its two passengers still slept in their contour chairs.

Karin heard the blast and looked upward at the rising monster of space. She turned to the bald robot beside her.

"Why, Destiny?" she pleaded. "Why did you do it?"

"I'm not a man," said Destiny, "but your mother fitted me with human emotions. You see, I love you too."

**THE END**



## **NOTHING LIKE MAKING SURE...**

From the March 1853 issue of SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN: "Experiments have been lately made at Chicago to ascertain the amount of oxygen necessary to support life. Six hundred persons having been placed in a hall in one of the hotels of that city, all the doors and windows were closed. At the end of the third half-hour it was found unsafe to continue the experiment any longer."

# The Revenge of Edwin Mudd

By JOHN JAKES

*Long live Edwin Mudd. Armed with nothing more than his indignation, he went forth to fight the battle of every television set owner in the land. His name will no doubt become immortal. And he made a nice piece of change, too.*

YOU may have noticed recently the change that has come over television in the past few months, without being aware of exactly why the change has taken place. The change stems directly from the brain and personality of one Edwin Mudd, and from the fact that Mudd was consumed by a burning hatred. No, it wasn't a hatred of the cyanide or .45-shell variety, but a hatred whose brand is much more familiar to all of us, the I'd - like - to - paste - that - bum - in - the - kisser variety. Such hatred is usually accompanied by feelings of acute frustration and extreme helplessness. Luckily for everyone, however, Edwin Mudd did not remain helpless.

The first tremors of the cataclysm might be said to

have been felt when the boys at the Grösshöch Brewery (It's MELL-ow and SOOO smooth!) got together and presented Mudd with a small table-model television set. Simply because Edwin Mudd drove a brewery truck does not indicate that he was a mental twelve-year-old. In fact he had three college degrees, one in electronics, one in fine arts and one in barbering. He had a full, cultured and adventurous life behind him. During World War I in France he had been one of a select company of intellectuals who had motorcycled on week-ends at a furious clip back from the trenches to spend a couple of days with Miss Stein in Paris. He had also scrubbed decks on a tramp steamer freighting to

Java, and dallied with sundry exotic belles while Victoria Falls tinkled in the background. He felt no need to creep into seclusion and contemplate his experiences, however. When he reached forty and his funds ran out, he took a job driving the brewery truck and stuck with it for fifteen years because it got him outside during fine weather and he got to meet a lot of interesting people. He could talk on any level. He could discuss Chaucer's relation to Boethius or the listic style of Gavilan with equal ease. He saved his money and was at home at the Ballet Russe when it came to town, and he was also an expert poker player, could consume huge quantities of beer and knew more earthy jokes than any of his associates at the brewery. He also loved to tinker with electronic gadgets.

Above all, he had a supreme love of the average individual, and hated to see him preyed upon in any form.

When his fifteenth anniversary as a truck driver came, the boys gave him a television set after finding that he did not own one. Mudd grudgingly said he would give it a try. "Though I'm pretty damn

sure I won't like it, from what I've read about it in the papers."

He installed the set in his small apartment, and he and his landlady, Mrs. Zigler would spend companionable evenings together with the new curiosity, watching the flickering screen.

Then one evening Mudd happened to flick the dial to channel eight, and Smiles Snider appeared, announcing a local talent show.

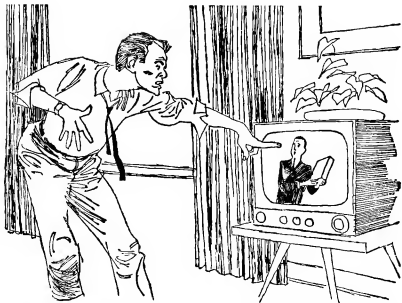
Thus the immortal hatred began.

Smiles Snider was thin, corpse-like, limp-wristed and oozing with phony good nature. As Mudd watched him, he began to writhe.

"Friends," Smiles Snider intoned, "let me tell you how my wife and I save money every week by saving Green Seal Grocery Gift Stamps. You all know how it is, friends, when you run short of money."

"Now ain't *he* an anemic looking cuss," Mrs. Zigler commented, shaking her stout graying head. "My, my. He doesn't seem . . . well . . . I guess you'd call it sincere."

"How can they expect monstrosities like that to sell a product?" Mudd complained grumpily, fixing a dour eye on Smiles Snider's chalky face.



"I guarantee Green Seal Grocery Gift Stamps as the best type of free premiums ever offered to the public," announced Smiles. His upper lip curled in superior fashion. "Come on now, folks. My wife and I shop at Green Seal stores every week. Give it a try! Now here's our next act, a wonderful little girl, six years old, singing her version of the *Habanera* . . ."

"My God," Mudd groaned, puffing his pipe alight.

"It does seem a shame that there's so much tripe like that to watch," Mrs. Zigler commented sadly.

"I wish the boys had never

given me the set," Mudd growled. "I've seen two good programs. All those damned ads . . ."

Hypnotized, as if contemplating a grisly spectacle on the ghostly square of dancing light, Edwin Mudd sat watching. He examined the program schedule in the newspaper. If he did not want to watch the amateur show, he could see either a quiz program whose jackpot was a portion of the profits of a Canadian uranium mine, or a wrestling event featuring masked men with pot bellies. No, he decided, he'd stick to this. For he had already de-

veloped a lively antipathy toward Smiles Snider and in peculiarly human fashion he enjoyed reveling in this feeling.

At the end of the program there was a station break. Then Smiles Snider appeared. "Howdy, friends. It's time for another session with your Camping Activities guide, Miss Viola Tichenor, sponsored by your Blue Seal Groceries and Produce Markets." Smiles smiled limpidly. "Friends, as a confirmed bachelor, I can tell you that nothing beats the selection of pre-cooked frozen dinners to be found at your Blue Seal Grocery and Produce Market. By the way . . ."

Mrs. Zigler sat up suddenly, perplexed. "Mr. Mudd, didn't he say less than half an hour ago that he and his wife always shopped at the Green Seal Stores?"

"Yes," purred Edwin Mudd with triumphant venom.

Mrs. Zigler scratched her head. "Doesn't that seem kind of foolish?"

"Foolish is not the word," Mudd groaned. "Imagine! All over the city, innocent people are victimized by this tripe."

". . . don't shop *any* place but your Blue Seal Grocery," Smiles said cheerily. "I rec-

ommend it without hesitation to all you folks out in television land."

"*De gustibus*," Mudd said vengefully. "But my taste's going sour."

"Er . . . what's that?" Mrs. Zigler asked.

"I said that I don't like this stuff."

"It *does* seem foolish, doesn't it?"

"We're prisoners, that's all." Mudd leaped up, waving his pipe excitedly. "Damn it, there's nothing wrong with entertainment, but that's stupidity . . . asininity . . . it's . . . it's . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Mudd," quavered the landlady in a worried tone. "Your face is getting so *red*."

"As well it should." Mudd scratched his leathery cheek, and cocked a malevolent eye at Miss Viola Tichenor who was demonstrating how to use everyday ingredients, boiled on a kitchen stove, to make a tick repellent. "I wonder . . . I wonder what could be done about such a thing," he murmured.

"Well, I wonder if it really matters, Mr. Mudd."

"That's the wrong damned attitude, Mrs. Zigler."

"I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar, Mr. Mudd."

"All right, all right. But do



you like that kind of thing?"

"No, but . . ."

"Well, you're average and so am I, Mrs. Zigler."

Mrs. Zigler blushed. "Mr. Mudd, you know I'm a lot . . . averager . . . is that what I mean to say? . . . than you are."

"It wouldn't make any difference if people complained," Mudd said, ignoring the compliment and thinking aloud. "Most people feel they wouldn't be listened to anyway. But . . . if there was a way . . ." Edwin Mudd's eyes lit upon a work table along the wall, scattered with electronic apparatus. "Ah!" It was a fiendish triumphant breath. "Ahhh!" He murmured, "By God, I can at least *try* . . ."

Mrs. Zigler felt genuinely alarmed at the rigid posture of Edwin Mudd. Mudd stood with fists clenched at his sides, his head thrown back, a look of exaltation in his eyes.

"Mr. Mudd, what's wrong with you?"

"Wrong?" Mudd laughed, ferociously. "Wrong? Nothing! I'm dedicated, Mrs. Zigler. Dedicated to stamping out Smiles Snider and his kind, stamping out the influence of the tripe-writers in back of

him and the whole concept of moronism, ineffectualness and hypnotic inducement by inane repetition. I'm dedicated to all *that*!"

With a lusty laugh he circled Mrs. Zigler's stout waist as best he could with his hands and whirled her around the room in a sort of impromptu tribal war dance.

"Oh . . . Mr. Mudd . . . please . . . put me down . . . oh . . . my . . . what . . . did you mean by all those . . . words . . . oh . . . my . . . put me . . . down . . ."

Reluctantly he complied with her wish. "I meant by those words," he said darkly, "that the victimized public will no longer be victimized. They won't have to *do* anything, won't have to make a move. I'll do it for them! Now you'd better leave, Mrs. Zigler, I've got work to do."

Mrs. Zigler left the room, considerably alarmed. Mudd shook his fist at the television, turned off the sound but left the picture in view. Smiles Snider appeared periodically, making foolish parroting movements with his mouth. Mudd attacked his work bench. After an hour he knew it would take much more labor and thought than he had anticipated, if it could be done at all. He got out his old elec-

tronics textbooks and sat up all night reading them.

Even the beauties of the outside world seen from the cab of a Grösshöch brewery truck seemed to pale for Edwin Mudd in the next couple of months. The boys at the brewery noticed him walking around entranced, talking to himself, taking out pieces of paper with abrupt suddenness and scribbling weird symbols on the paper with a stub of pencil whose end he chewed savagely between moments of scribbling.

The boys began to wonder why Edwin Mudd talked so much about television. Television in the morning, afternoon and even at night during poker sessions. The boys came to reflect that Mudd was somehow slipping his trolley. He could no longer play poker effectively. He was always staring into space. The Ballet Russe came to town and, wonder of wonders, he did not attend. When asked if he had any new jokes he would shake his head and say sharply, "No! I can't be bothered with such. I've got things to do." Always his topic of conversation was television. He took polls among the brewery workers. How many wives like soap commercials? How many families hate and loathe

Smiles Snider? How many individuals have phoned the network to complain, only to be met with the polite brush from the lips of a smoke-voiced female with perfect enunciation and a slight superior edge to her voice?

The apartment of Edwin Mudd filled with apparatus. He took long walking trips to out-of-the-way stores and junk yards to collect his material, since he had only a limited amount of money available.

But slowly a machine grew there on the work bench, a box-like affair, half feasible, half hare-brained. Some elements guaranteed to work, others doubtful. Adolph and Gustav Grösshöch, the brothers who owned the brewery, became personally interested in the growing apathy of Edwin Mudd toward his job. They interviewed him about it. He refused to say anything other than that he was at work upon a project of everlasting significance. The Grösshöch brothers shook their beefy heads. Yes, Edwin Mudd was at last slipping into second childhood.

Two months crept by. For Mudd, they raced. Three. Four. Six. Every night he flayed himself onward, incited

to fierce bursts of activity by the face of Smiles Snider and his leering compatriots on other channels. The machine was nearly finished. One more month. Complications. Another two months.

But at last, as dawn broke on a cold winter's morning near Christmas, Edwin Mudd got up from his work bench feeling three things. First, exhaustion. Second, apprehension. Third, fiendishly gleeful hope. He walked to the window of his apartment and looked out at the sifting snow on the bushes and car tops.

In the midst of the quiet scene, a ghostly figure seemed to appear. Its mouth moved, its hands waved, and the upper lip seemed to curl with faint contempt. The figure wavered there in the snow before Edwin Mudd's tired eyes. Mudd looked at his watch and sighed. In another hour it would be time to start to work. Then he glanced back at the street. The grisly apparition was still there.

"Merry Christmas, Smiles," Edwin Mudd murmured to the figure. "If things work right . . . tonight you get yours."

(SCENE: MAIN STUDIO OF WXBX—TV. TIME: ONE MINUTE BEFORE TEN P.M. SMILES SNIDER

SITS DISCONSOLATELY ON A CHAIR, PUFFING A CIGARETTE AND SCOWLING UNPLEASANTLY INTO SPACE. HE PUFFS AGAIN.)

VOICE FROM THE CONTROL ROOM: Hey, Smiles....

SMILES: Yeah?

VOICE: Thirty seconds....

SMILES: (WITH A S N O R T ) Okay, Jack. (STANDS UP. CRUSHES CIGARETTE ON FLOOR.) Time to give the stupes the old pep-talk, eh, Jack?

VOICE FROM THE CONTROL ROOM: (SNORTS) Feed it to 'em, Smiles ol' boy. All about that wonderful ol' Blue Seal Grocery . . . or is it Green?

SMILES: Green, blue, who gives a damn?

(ADJUSTS THE FRONT OF HIS SUIT. AFFIXES A SMILE TO HIS FACE. LOOKS AT CLOCK. RECEIVES SIGNAL FROM CONTROL ROOM.)

SMILES: Howdy, friends. It's time for another session with your Camping Activities guide Miss Viola Tichenor, sponsored by Blue Seal Groceries and Produce Markets. (PATRONIZING SMILE) Friends, as a confirmed bachelor . . .

VOICE FROM CONTROL ROOM AMPLIFIER:

*Braaack!*

SMILES: Awrk. (STARTING. GLANCES AT CONTROL ROOM IN MOMENTARY PANIC) . . . as a confirmed bachelor . . .

VOICE FROM THE AMPLIFIER: I thought you said on the amateur program that you and your wife always shopped at the Green Seal Stores.

SMILES: (SOTTO) Jack, for Gossake . . .

VOICE: Jack can't hear you. He can't talk to you. I'm doing the talking. You *bum!*

SMILES: (IN CAMERA. FACE WORKS SPASMODICALLY) Uh . . . ulp . . . due to circumstances beyond our control . . .

VOICE: Now just a darned minute there. Don't try to get out of it. The trouble with you is, you've got too *much* control, my friend, and we haven't got enough.

SMILES: (CHEWING NAILS) We . . . we . . .?

VOICE: Yes, we. The people you bamboozle with your nonsense.

SMILES: (HOWLING) Do something, Jack! Turn him off! Turn him off! Who is it? Some guy in another control room? For Gossakes . . .

VOICE: I am not in another control room. I am six miles away across the city.

And for the first time in the history of your noxious existence as a huckster, I am talking back. How do you like that, Smiles old boy? Where are all the smiles now, Smiles you bum?

(JACK POUNDS FIERCELY ON CONTROL ROOM WINDOW. ONE HAND TEARS HIS TIE FROM HIS THROAT. HIS EYES ROLL FIERCELY. CAMERA MAN RECEIVES SIGNAL AND CAMERA SWITCHES TO ONE MOMENT PLEASE SIGN. SOUND IS CUT OFF.)

VOICE: Sure, that's all right, cut me off. I'm still talking to you, Smiles. Because you can't get away with your tricks any more.

SMILES: (GIBBERING) I'm going nuts . . . I *must* be going nuts . . .

VOICE: Oh, no. I have devised a machine to make this process possible. From now on we the audience will not merely be on the receiving end. At the flick of a switch we will talk back. And God help you when you try to foist stupidity upon us any more. No one listening to you will be able to hear you for all the hundreds of people talking back to you at once.

SMILES: (IN ANGUISH) Who *are* you?

**VOICE:** My name is Edwin Mudd. I will give you my address, because I expect that your employer will want to have a conference with me. That is, unless he desires to go into the used car business or some other profession.

**SMILES:** (STARTING AWAY) I'm leaving. Yes, by God, I'm leaving! I can see the handwriting on the wall . . .

**VOICE:** (CHUCKLING) Or the voice in the air, eh, Smiles? Smiles? I guess he must be gone . . .

Of the thousands watching the telecast, only a few hundred bothered to write to the network about it. Most considered it some form of practical joke, perpetrated by a disgruntled station employee who had probably been fired hastily as a result. It aroused interest in some of the nationally syndicated television columns, but since the part about the invention of the machine had not been telecast, the real secret was kept.

The networks themselves however were in no such state of bliss. They recognized trouble when they saw it. Or in this case, heard it. So it was that one day in spring three men sat before Edwin Mudd in his apartment like

the accused before a judge. They were the presidents of the Universal, Nationwide and United Broadcasting Companies respectively.

Edwin Mudd laid down the law.

"Gentlemen," he said, sitting in his worn-out armchair and puffing on his pipe, "from now on I'm your official censor. Everything that goes out on television—and let's throw in radio too, how about that?—will get my personal approval. Do your damndest with your programs, but quit feeding the public repetitious illiteracies and trumped-up scientific claims. Do I make my point? Otherwise, I will announce the invention of my machine to the public and you'll never be able to broadcast in peace again."

"But the advertisers . . ." wailed the president of the Nationwide Broadcasting Company.

"Inform your advertisers," Edwin Mudd said, his eyes glowing happily, "of the way, as the expression goes, the ball bounces."

The president of the United Broadcasting Company crunched his hundred-dollar homburg between his fists. "By heaven, Mudd, I'll have you assassinated!"

"That would not work either. I have placed complete reports of my invention, plus directions for duplicating it, in sealed envelopes at eight points in the city. On the event of my death by violent means those envelopes will be opened and the jig will be up."

"It's fantastic!" wheezed the president of Universal Broadcasting. "The hushing-up we'll have to do . . . with the advertisers . . . and . . . we . . . we may be ruined."

"The public has been ruined for some time," Mudd said dryly. "Knuckle under. Or else."

The presidents, of course, had no choice.

So you see now why there has been a change in television during the past months. Edwin Mudd no longer has time to drive a Grösshöch brewery truck. He stays in his apartment most of the day, going over material submitted to him by network and local tele-

vising centers. He regrets the loss of his freedom somewhat, but is compensated by his belief that he is doing a service to mankind. Actually there are not eight sealed envelopes, but only one, and that in the care of Mrs. Zigler, and now forgotten behind her cookie jar.

Mudd even persuaded the networks to pay him a slight living allowance, though if you questioned him on it he would say that this definitely is blackmail, not quite in line with the humanitarian nature of his work. But after all, a man must live.

And the boys at the brewery still give him a ride on their trucks now and then. As one of them put it, Mudd was such a good guy before he went slightly off his trolley, that it was nice to be able to let him have a little fun on one of the trucks now that he was normal again.

**THE END**

## **ATOM BOMB STATIC?**

World conditions have become so bad that they are making it very hard for spiritualists to contact the departed.

*—The Psychic News*

# THE GONE DOGS

By FRANK HERBERT

*Something was happening to all the dogs on earth—a rare virus from outer space. Now maybe that doesn't seem very important, but try taking all the dogs away from all the dog lovers in the world and see what a fuss you kick up.*

A GREEN turbo-copter moved over the New Mexico sand flats, its rotor blades going whik-whik-whik. Evening sunlight cast deep shadows ahead of it where the ground shelved away to a river canyon. The 'copter settled to a rock outcropping, a hatch popped open and a steel cage containing one female coyote was thrown out. The cage door fell away. In one jump, the animal was out of its prison and running. It whisked over the outcropping, leaped down to a ledge along the canyon wall and was out of sight around a bend—in its blood a mutated virus which had started with hog cholera.

The lab had a sharp chemical odor in which could be detected iodoform and ether. Under it was that musky, wet-fur smell found in the pres-

ence of caged animals. A despondent fox terrier sulked in a cage at one end; the remains of a poodle were stretched on a dissecting board atop a central bench, a tag on its leg labelled X-8. **PULLMAN VETERINARY RESEARCH CENTER, LABORATORY E.** Indirect lighting touched everything with a shadowless indifference.

Biologist Varley Trent, a lanky, dark-haired man with angular features, put his scalpel in a tray beside the poodle, stepped back, looked across at Dr. Walter Hammeers, professor of veterinary medicine. The professor was a plump, sandy-haired Chinese-Dutchman with the smooth-skinned look of an Oriental idol. He stood beside the dissecting bench, staring at the poodle.

"Another failure," said Trent. "Each one of these I

autopsy, I say to myself we're that much closer to the last dog on Earth."

The professor nodded. "Came down to give you the latest. Don't see how it helps us, but for what it's worth, this virus started in coyote."

"Coyote?"

Professor Han-Meers found a lab stool, pulled it up, sat down. "Yes. Ranch hand in New Mexico broke it. Talked to the authorities. His boss, a fellow named Porter Durkin, is a V.M.D., has a veterinary hospital on a ranch down there. Used a radioactive carbon egg to mutate hog cholera. Hoped to make a name for himself, killing off all the coyotes. Made a name for himself all right. Government had to move in troops to keep him from being lynched."

Trent ran a hand through his hair. "Didn't the fool realize his disease would spread to other canines?"

"Apparently didn't even think of it. He has a license from one of those little hog-wallow colleges, but I don't see how anyone that stupid could make the grade."

"How about the coyote?"

"Oh, that was a great success. Sheep ranchers say they haven't lost an animal to coyotes in over a month. Only things worrying them now

are bears, cougars and the lack of dogs to . . ."

"Speaking of dogs," said Trent, "we're going to need more test animals here by tomorrow. Serum nine isn't doing a thing for that fox terrier. He'll die tonight sometime."

"We'll have lots of test animals by tomorrow," said Han-Meers. "The last two dog isolation preserves in Canada reported primary infestations this morning."

Trent drummed his fingers on the bench top. "What's the government doing about the offer from the Vegan biophysicists?"

Han-Meers shrugged. "We are still turning them down. The Vegans are holding out for full control of the project. You know their reputation for bio-physical alterations. They might be able to save our dogs for us, but what we'd get back wouldn't be a dog any longer. It'd be some elongated, multi-legged, scaly-tailed monstrosity. I wish I knew why they went in for those fish-tail types."

"Linked gene," said Trent. "Intelligence factor coupled. They use their *mikeses* generators to open up the gene pairs and . . ."

"That's right," said Han-





SK

The howl of the coyote was heard across the land.

Meers. "You studied with them. What's the name of that Vegan you're always talking about?"

"Ger (whistle) Anso-Anso."

"That's the one. Isn't he on Earth with the Vegan delegation?"

Trent nodded. "I met him at the Quebec conference ten years ago—the year before we made the bio-physical survey to Vega. He's really a nice fellow once you get to know him."

"Not for me." Han-Meers shook his head. "They're too tall and disdainful. Make me feel inferior. Always harping about their damned *mikeses* generators and what they can do in bio-physics."

"They can do it, too."

"That's what makes them so damned irritating!"

Trent laughed. "If it'll make you feel any better, the Vegans may be all puffed up with pride about their bio-physics, but they're jealous as all git-out over our tool facility."

"Hmmmph." said Han-Meers.

"I still think we should send them dogs for experimental purposes," said Trent. "The Lord knows we're not going to have any dogs left

pretty soon at the rate we're going."

"We won't send them a sick spaniel as long as Gilberto Nathal is in the Federated Senate," said Han-Meers. "Every time the subject comes up, he jumps to his feet and hollers about the pride of Earth and the out-worlder threat."

"But . . ."

"It hasn't been too long since the Denebian campaign," said Han-Meers.

Trent wet his lips with his tongue. "Mmmmm, hmmm. How are the other research centers coming?"

"Same as we are. The morning report shows a lot of words which sum up to a big round zero." Han-Meers reached into his pocket, extracted a yellow sheet of paper. "Here, you may as well see this. It'll be out pretty soon, anyway." He thrust the paper into Trent's hand.

Trent glanced at the heading:

BUREAU-GRAM — DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SANITATION — PRIMARY SECRET:

He looked up at Han-Meers.

"Read it," said the professor.

Trent looked back to the *bureau-gram*. "Department doctors today confirmed that

Virus D-D which is attacking the world's canines is one-hundred percent fatal. In spite of all quarantine precautions it is spreading. The virus shows kinship to hog cholera, but will thrive in a solution of protomycetin strong enough to kill any other virus on the list. It shows ability to become dormant and anerobic. Unless a suitable weapon with which to combat this disease is found within two more months, Earth is in danger of losing its entire population of wolves, dogs, foxes, coyote . . ."

Trent looked back to Han-Meers. "We've all suspected it was this bad, but . . ." He tapped the *bureau-gram*.

Han-Meers slipped the paper from Trent's grasp. "Varley, you held out on the census takers when they came around counting dogs, didn't you?"

Trent pursed his lips. "What makes you say a thing like that?"

"Varley, I wouldn't turn you over to the police. I am suggesting you contact your Vegan and give him your dogs."

Trent took a deep breath. "I gave him five puppies last week."

A Capital correspondent for a news service had broken the story six weeks previously, following up a leak in the Health and Sanitation Committee of the Federated Senate. A new virus was attacking the world's canine population and no means of fighting it was known. People already realized their pets were dying off in droves. The news story was enough to cause a panic. Interstellar passenger space disappeared. Powerful men exerted influence for themselves and friends. People ran every which way with their pets, hopelessly tangling inter-world quarantine restrictions. And the inevitable rackets appeared.

*SPECIAL CHARTER  
SHIP TO PLANETS OF AL-  
DEBARAN. STRICTEST  
QUARANTINE REQUIRE-  
MENTS. TRAINED AT-  
TENDANTS TO GUARD  
YOUR PETS IN TRANSIT.  
PRICE: FIFTY THOUSAND  
CREDITS A KILO.*

The owners, of course, could not accompany their pets, shipping space being limited.

This racket was stopped when a Federation patrol ship ran into a strange meteor swarm beyond Pluto, stopped to map its course,

discovered the swarm was composed of the frozen bodies of dogs.

Eleven days after the virus story appeared, the Arcturian planets banned Terran dogs. The Arcturians knew dog-smuggling would begin and their people could profit.

Trent kept six part-beagle hounds in a servo-mech kennel at an Olympic Mountain hunting camp. They were at the camp when the government instituted its emergency census of dogs. Trent deliberately overlooked mentioning them.

Leaving Pullman at three o'clock the morning after he talked to Han-Meers, he put his jet-copter on auto-pilot, slept until he reached Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen commander of the Federated Police was a graying, burn-scarred veteran of the Denebian campaign. His office was a square room overlooking the harbor. The walls were hung with out-world weapons, group photographs of officers and men. The commander stood up as Trent entered, waved him to a chair. "Makaroff's the name. What can I do for you?"

Trent introduced himself, sat down, explained that he

was a member of the Pullman research staff, that he had nine hounds—six adults and three puppies—at a mountain kennel.

The commander seated himself, grasped the arms of his chair, leaned back. "Why aren't they in one of the government preserves?"

Trent looked the man in the eyes. "Because I was convinced they'd be safer where they are and I was right. The preserves are infested. Yet my hounds are in perfect health. What's more, Commander, I've discovered that humans are carrying the disease. We . . ."

"You mean if I pet a dog that could kill it?"

"That's right."

The commander fell silent. Presently, he said, "So you disobeyed the quarantine act, eh?"

"Yes."

"I've done the same kind of thing myself on occasion," said the commander. "You see some stupid order given, you know it won't work; so you go against it. If you're wrong they throw the book at you; if you're right they pin a medal on you. I remember one time in the Denebian campaign when . . ."

"Could you put an air pa-

trol over my camp?" asked Trent.

The commander pulled at his chin. "Hounds, eh? Nothing better than a good hunting hound. Damned shame to see them die with all the rest." He paused. "Air patrol, eh? No humans?"

"We have two months to find an answer to this virus or there won't be another dog on earth," said Trent. "You see how important those dogs could be?"

"Bad as that, eh?" He pulled a vidi-phone to him. "Get me Perlan." He turned to Trent. "Where is your camp?"

Trent gave him the vectors. The commander scribbled them on a scratch pad.

A face came on the screen. "Yes, sir."

The commander turned back to the vidi-phone. "Perlan, I want a robotics air patrol—twenty-four-hour duty—over a hunting camp at," he glanced at the scratch pad, "vectors 8181-A and 0662-Y, Olympic West Slope. There's a kennel at the camp with nine hounds in it. No humans at all must contact those dogs." He wet his lips with his tongue. "A doctor has just told me that humans are carrying this Virus D-D thing."

When Trent landed at Pullman that afternoon he found Han-Meers waiting in Lab E. The professor sat on the same stool as though he had not moved in two days. His slant eyes contemplated the cage which had held the fox terrier. Now there was an air-dale in the enclosure. As Trent entered, Han-Meers turned.

"Varley, what is this the Aberdeen policeman tells the news services?"

Trent closed the lab door. *So the commandant had talked.*

"Flores Clinic was on the line twice today," said Han-Meers. "Want to know what we discovered that they overlooked. The policeman has perhaps made up a story?"

Trent shook his head. "No. I told him a hunch of mine was an actual fact. I had to get an air patrol over my hunting camp. Those hounds are in perfect health."

Han-Meers nodded. "They have been without such a convenience all summer. Now they have to have it."

"I've been afraid they were dead. After all, I raised those hounds from pups. We've hunted and . . ."

"I see. And tomorrow we tell everybody it was a big mistake. I had thought you

possessed more scientific integrity than that."

Trent hid his anger behind a passive face, slipped off his coat, donned a lab smock. "My dogs were isolated from humans all summer. We . . ."

"The Flores people have been thorough in their investigation," said Han-Meers. "They suspect we are trying to . . ."

"Not thorough enough." Trent opened a cupboard door, took out a bottle of green liquid. "Are you going to stay here and help or are you going to let me tackle this one alone?"

Han-Meers took off his coat, found an extra lab smock. "You are out on a thin limb, Varley." He turned, smiled. "But what a wonderful opportunity to give those M.D.'s a really big come-uppance."

At nine-sixteen the next morning, Trent dropped a glass beaker. It shattered on the tile floor and Trent's calm shattered with it. He cursed for two minutes.

"We are tired," said Han-Meers. "We will rest, come back to it later. I will put off the Flores people and the others today. There is still . . ."

"No." Trent shook his head. "We're going to take another

skin wash on me with Clarendon's Astringent."

"But we've already tried that twice and . . ."

"Once more," said Trent. "This time we'll add the synthetic dog blood *before* fractionating."

At ten-twenty-two, Han-Meers set the final test tube in a plastic diffraction rack, pressed a switch at its base. A small silver cobweb shimmered near the top of the tube.

"Ahhhhhhh!" said the professor.

They traced back. By noon they had the pattern: Dormant virus was carried in the human glands of perspiration, coming out through the pores—mostly in the palms of the hands—only under stress of emotion. Once out of the pores, the virus dried, became anerobic.

"If I hadn't dropped that beaker and become angry," said Trent.

"We would still be looking," added Han-Meers. "Devil of a one, this. Dormant and in minute quantity. That is why they missed it. Who tests an excited subject? They wait for him to become calm."

"Each man kills the thing he loves," quoted Trent.

"Should pay more attention to philosophers like Oscar

Wilde," said Han-Meers. "Now I will call the doctors, tell them of their error. They are not going to like a mere biologist showing them up."

"It was an accident," said Trent.

"An accident based on observation of your dogs," said Han-Meers. "It is, of course, not the first time such accidents have occurred to mere biologists. There was Pasteur. They had him stoned in the village streets for . . ."

"Pasteur was a chemist," said Trent curtly. He turned, put test tube and stand on a side bench. "We'll have to tell the authorities to set up robotics service for the remaining dogs. That may give us time to see this thing through."

"I will use your lab phone to call the doctors," said Han-Meers. "I cannot wait to hear that Flores' voice when . . ."

The phone rang. Han-Meers put it to his ear. "Yes. I am me . . . I mean, I am here. Yes, I will take the call." He waited. "Oh, hello, Dr. Flores. I was just about to . . ." Han-Meers fell silent, listened. "Oh, you did?" His voice was flat. "Yes, that agrees with our findings. Yes, through the pores of the hands mostly. We were waiting to confirm it, to be certain . . . Yes, by our Dr.

Trent. He's a biologist on the staff here. I believe some of your people were his students. Brilliant fellow. Deserves full credit for the discovery." There was a long silence. "I insist on scientific integrity, Dr. Flores, and I have your report in my hands. It absolves humans as carriers of the virus. I agree that this development will be bad for your clinic, but that cannot be helped. Good-bye, Dr. Flores. Thank you for calling." He hung up the phone, turned. Trent was nowhere in sight.

*That afternoon the last remaining pureblood Saint Bernard died at Angúac, Manitoba. By the following morning, Georgian officials had confirmed that their isolation kennels near Igurtsk were infested. The search for uninfected dogs continued, conducted now by robots. In all the world there were nine dogs known to be free of Virus D-D—six adult hounds and three puppies. They sniffed around their mountain kennel, despondent at the lack of human companionship.*

When Trent arrived at his bachelor apartment that night he found a visitor, a tall (almost seven feet) Class C humanoid, head topped by twin, feather-haired crests, eyes

shaded by slitted membranes like Venetian blinds. His slender body was covered by a blue robe, belted at the waist.

"Ger!" said Trent. He shut the door.

"Friend Varley," said the Vegan in his odd, whistling tones.

They held out their hands, pressed palms together in the Vegan fashion. Ger's seven-fingered hands felt overwarm.

"You've a fever," said Trent. "You've been too long on Earth."

"It is the accursed oxidized iron in your environment," said Ger. "I will take an increased dosage of medicine tonight." He relaxed his crests, a gesture denoting pleasure. "But it is good to see you again, Varley."

"And you," said Trent. "How are the . . ." He put a hand down, made the motion of petting a dog.

"That is why I came," said Ger. "We need more."

"More? Are the others dead?"

"Their cells are alive in new descendants," said Ger. "We used an acceleration chamber to get several generations quickly, but we are not satisfied with the results. Those were very strange animals, Varley. Is it not peculiar

that they were identical in appearance?"

"It sometimes happens," said Trent.

"And the number of chromosomes," said Ger. "Aren't there . . ."

"Some special breeds differ," said Trent hurriedly.

"Oh." Ger nodded his head. "Do you have more of this breed we may take?"

"It'll be tricky to do," said Trent, "but maybe if we are very careful, we can get away with it."

Commander Makaroff was *delighted* to renew his acquaintance with the famous Dr. Trent. He was *delighted* to meet the visitor from far Vega, although a little less delighted. It was clear the commander was generally suspicious of out-worlders. He ushered the two into his office, seated them, took his place behind his desk.

"I'd like a pass permitting Dr. Anso-Anso to visit my kennel," said Trent. "Not being an Earth-human, he does not carry the virus and it will be quite safe to . . ."

"Why?"

"You have, perhaps, heard of the Vegan skill in bio-physics," said Trent. "Dr. Anso-Anso is assisting me in a line of research. He needs to take



several blood and culture samples from . . ."

"Couldn't a robot do it?"

"The observations depend on highly specialized knowledge and there are no robots with this training."

"Hmmm." Commander Makaroff considered this. "I see. Well, if you vouch for him, Dr. Trent, I'm sure he's all right." His tone suggested that Dr. Trent *could be* mistaken. He took a pad from a drawer, scrawled a pass, handed it to Trent. "I'll have a police 'copter take you in."

"We have a specially sterilized 'copter with our lab equipment," said Trent. "Robotics International is servicing it right now."

Commander Makaroff nodded. "I see. Then I'll have an escort ready for you whenever you say."

The summons came the next day on a pink sheet of paper:

"Dr. Varley Trent is ordered to appear tomorrow before the special sub-committee of the Federated Senate Committee on Health and Sanitation at a hearing to be conducted at 4 p.m. in the office building of the Federated Senate." It was signed, "Oscar Olaffson, special assistant to Sen. Gilberto Nathal."

Trent accepted the summons in his lab, read it, took it up to Han-Meers' office.

The professor read the order, handed it back to Trent. "Nothing is said about charges, Varley. Where were you yesterday?"

Trent sat down. "I got my Vegan friend into the preserve so he could snatch the three puppies. He's half way home with them by this time."

"They discovered it on the morning count, of course," said Han-Meers. "Ordinarily, they'd have just hauled you off to jail, but there's an election coming up. Nathal must be cozy with your Commander Makaroff."

Trent looked at the floor.

"The Senator will crucify you in spite of your virus discovery," said Han-Meers. "I'm afraid you've made powerful enemies. Dr. Flores is the brother-in-law of Senator Grapopulus of the Appropriations Committee. They'll bring in Flores Clinic people to claim that the virus carrier could have been discovered without you."

"But they're my dogs! I can . . ."

"Not since the emergency census and quarantine act," said Han-Meers. "You're guilty of sequestering government property." He pointed a

finger at Trent. "And these enemies you've made will..."

"I've made! You were the one had to pull the grandstand act with Flores."

"Now, Varley. Let's not quarrel among ourselves."

Trent looked at the floor. "Okay. What's done is done."

"I have a little idea," said Han-Meers. "The college survey ship, the Elmendorff, is out at Hartley Field. It has been fueled and fitted for a trip to Sagittarius."

"What does that mean?"

"The ship is well guarded, of course, but a known member of the staff with a forged note from me could get aboard. Could you handle the Elmendorff alone?"

"Certainly. That's the ship we took to Vega on the biophysical survey."

"Then run for it. Get that ship into hyper-drive and they'll never catch you."

Trent shook his head. "That would be admitting my guilt."

"Man, you *are* guilty! Senator Nathal is going to *discover* that tomorrow. It'll be big news. But if you run away, that will be bigger news and the senator's screaming will be just so much more background noise."

"I don't know."

"People are tired of his noises, Varley."

"I still don't like it."

"Varley, the senator is desperate for vote-getting news. Give him a little more time, a little more desperation, he'll go too far."

"I'm not worried about the senator. I'm worried about..."

"The dogs," said Han-Meers. "And if you escaped to Vega you could give them the benefit of your knowledge of terrestrial biology. You'd have to do it by remote control, of course, but..." He left the idea dangling there.

Trent pursed his lips.

"Every minute you waste makes your chances of escape that much slimmer." Han-Meers pushed a pad toward Trent. "Here's my letterhead. Forge your note."

Twenty minutes after Trent's 'copter took off for Hartley Field, a government 'copter settled to the campus parking area. Two men emerged, hurried to Han-Meers' office, presented police credentials. "We're looking for a Dr. Varley Trent. He's charged with violating the dog-restriction act. He's to be held in custody."

Han-Meers looked properly horrified. "I think he went

home. He said something about not feeling well."

Senator Nathal raged. His plump body quivered. His normally red face became redder. He shouted, he screamed. His fuming countenance could be seen nightly on video. Just when he was reaching a fine climax, warning people against unbridled science, he was pushed aside by more important news.

The last dog in an isolation preserve—a brindle chow—died from virus infection. Before the senator could build up steam for a new attack, the government announced the discovery of an Arctic wolf pack of twenty-six animals untouched by virus. A day later, robot searchers turned up a live twelve-year-old mongrel on Easter Island and five cocker spaniels on Tierra del Fuego. Separate preserves for dogs and wolves were prepared on the west slope of the Olympic Mountains, all of the animals transported there.

Wolves, cockers, mongrel and hounds—they were the world's pets. Excursions in sealed 'copters were operated from Aberdeen to a point five kilometers from the dog-wolf preserve. There, powerful glasses sometimes gave a

glimpse of motion which imagination could pad into a dog or wolf.

About the time Senator Nathal was getting ready to launch a new blast, pointing out that Trent's hounds were not necessarily important, that there had been other canine survivors, the twelve-year-old mongrel died of old age.

Dog lovers of the world mourned. The press took over and all the glory of mongrel-dom was rehashed. Senator Nahal again was background noise.

Trent headed for Vega, hit hyper-drive as soon as he had cleared the sun's area of warp. He knew that the Vegans would have to quarantine him to protect the dogs, but he could follow the experiments on video, help with his knowledge of terrestrial biology.

Professor Han-Meers, protesting ill health, turned his college duties over to an assistant, went on a vacation tour of the world. First, he stopped at the capital, met Senator Nathal, apologized for Dr. Trent's defection and praised the politician's stand.

In Geneva, Han-Meers met a pianist whose pet dalmations had been among the

first to die in the epidemic. At Cairo, he met a government official who had bred wolf hounds, also among the first deceased. In Paris, he met the wife of a furrier whose pet airdale, *Coco*, had died in the third wave of the epidemic. In Moscow, in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Singapore, in Peking, in San Francisco, in Des Moines, in Chicago, he met others in like circumstances. To all he gave notes of introduction to Senator Nathal, explaining that the senator would see they received special treatment if they wanted to visit the Olympic preserve. Han-Meers expected at least one of these people to become a scandalous nuisance sufficient to insure the senator's political embarrassment.

The wife of the Paris furrier, Mme. Estagién Couloc, paid off, but in a manner Han-Meers had not anticipated.

Mme. Couloc was a slim woman of perhaps forty-five, chic in the timeless French fashion, childless, with a narrow, haughty face and a manner to match it. But her grandmother had been a farm wife and underneath the surface of pampered rich woman, Mme. Couloc was tough. She came to Aberdeen com-

plete with two maids, a small Alp of luggage and a note from Senator Nathal. She had convinced herself that all of this *nonsense* about humans carrying the disease couldn't possibly apply to her. *A few simple sanitary precautions and she could have a dog of her own.*

Mme. Couloc meant to have a part-beagle dog, no matter the cost. The fact that there were no dogs to be had, made her need all the more urgent. Cautious inquiries at Aberdeen convinced her this would have to be a lone-handed job. Amidst the tangled, psychological desperation which filled her mind, she worked out a plan which had all of the evasive cunning characteristic of the mentally ill.

From the air, on one of the daily excursions, Mme. Couloc surveyed the terrain. It was rugged enough to discourage a less determined person. The area had been maintained in its natural state for seven hundred years. Thick undergrowth of salal, devil club and huckleberry crowded the natural avenues of access to the interior. Rivers were full of the spring snow melt. Ridgetops were tangles of windfalls, wild blackberries in the burns, granite outcroppings. After the rough terrain there

was a double fence—each unit sixteen meters high, a kilometer between.

Mme. Couloc returned to Aberdeen, left her maids at the hotel, flew to Seattle where she bought tough camping clothes, a rope and grappling hook, a light pack, concentrated food and a compass. A map of the preserve was easy to obtain. They were sold as souvenirs.

Then she went fishing in the Straights of Juan de Fuca, staying at Neah Bay. To the south towered the Olympics, remote snow caps.

For three days it rained; five days Mme. Couloc fished with a guide. On the ninth day she went fishing alone. The next morning, the Federated Coast Guard picked up her overturned boat off Tatoosh Light. By that time she was nineteen kilometers south of Sequim, two kilometers inside the prohibited area which surrounded the fences. She slept all day in a spruce thicket. Moonlight helped her that night, but it took the entire night for her to come within sight of the fence. That day she crouched in a tangle of Oregon grape bushes, saw two tripod-legged robot patrols pass on the other side of the fence. At nightfall she moved forward,

waited for a patrol to pass and go out of sight. The grapple and rope took her over the top. The kilometer between fences was cleared of trees and underbrush. She crossed it swiftly, scaled the final barrier.

The robotics patrols had counted too heavily on the forbidding terrain and they had not figured a psychotic woman into their plans.

Two kilometers inside the preserve, Mme. Couloc found a cedar copse in which to hide. Her heart racing, she crouched in the copse, waiting for the dawn in which to find *her dog*. There were scratches on her face, hands and legs; her clothes were torn. *But she was inside!*

Several times that night she had to dry her perspiring palms against her khaki hiking trousers. Toward morning, she fell asleep on the cold ground. Bess and Eagle found her there just after dawn.

Mme. Couloc awoke to the scraping of a warm, damp tongue against her cheek. For a moment, she thought it was her dead *Coco*. Then she realized where she was.

*And the beautiful dogs!*

She threw her arms around Bess, who was as starved for human affection as was Mme. Couloc.

*Oh, you beautifuls!*

The robotics patrol found them there shortly before noon. The robots were counting dogs with the aid of the tiny transmitters they had imbedded in the flesh of each animal. Mme. Couloc had been waiting for nightfall in which to escape with a dog.

Bess and Eagle ran from the robots. Mme. Couloc screamed and raged as the impersonal mechanicals took her away.

That afternoon, Eagle touched noses with a wolf female through the fence separating their enclosures.

Although the robots put each dog in isolation, they were too late. And nobody thought to bother with the wolves in their separate preserve.

*In seven weeks the dog-wolf preserves were emptied by Virus D-D. Mme. Couloc was sent to a mental hospital in spite of the pleas of an expensive lawyer. The news services made much of Senator Nathal's note which had been found in her pocket.*

Earth officials sent a contrite message to Vega. It was understood, said the message, that one Dr. Varley Trent had given Earth dogs to a Vegan bio-physicist. Were there, by

any chance, some dogs still alive?

Back came the Vegan reply: *We have no dogs. We do not know the present whereabouts of Dr. Trent.*

Trent's ship came out of hyper-drive with Vega large in the screens. The sun's flaming prominences were clearly visible. At eight hundred thousand kilometers, he increased magnification, began scanning for the planet. Instead, he picked up a Vegan guard ship arrowing toward him. The Vegan was only six thousand kilometers off when it launched a torpedo. The proximity explosion cut off Trent's quick leap for the transmitter to give his identity. The ship buckled and rocked. Emergency doors slammed, air hissed, warning lights came on, bells clanged. Trent scrambled to the only lifeboat remaining in his section. The tiny escape craft was still serviceable, although its transmitter was cracked open.

He kept the lifeboat in the shadow of his ship's wreckage as long as he could, then dove for the Vegan planet which loomed at two o'clock on his screen. As soon as his driver tubes came alight, the Vegan sped after him. Trent

pushed the little boat to its limit, but the pursuer still gained. They were too close to the planet now for the Vega to use another torpedo.

The lifeboat screamed into the thin edge of the atmosphere. *Too fast!* The air-cooling unit howled with the overload. A rear surface control flared red, melted, fused. Trent had time to fire the emergency nose rockets, cut in automatic pilot before he blacked out. The ship dived, partly out of control, nose rockets still firing. Relays clicked—*full alarm!*—circuits designed to guard human life in an emergency came alive. Some worked, some had been destroyed.

Somewhere, he could hear running water. It was dark where he was, or perhaps lighted by a faint redness. His eyelids were stuck tightly. He could feel folds of cloth around him. A parachute! The robot controls of the lifeboat had ejected him in the chute-seat as a last resort.

Trent tried to move. His muscles refused to obey. He could sense numbness in his hips, a tingling loss of specific perception in his arms.

Then he heard it—the bay-  
ing of a hound—far and  
clear. It was a sound he had

never again expected to hear. The bugling note was repeated. It reminded him of frosty nights on Earth, following Bess and Eagle and . . .

*The bay-  
ing of a hound!*

Panic swept through him. The hound mustn't find him! He was Earth-human, loaded with deadly virus!

Straining at his cheek muscle, Trent managed to open one eye, saw that it was not dark, but a kind of yellow twilight under the folds of the parachute. His eyelids had been clotted with blood.

Now he could hear running feet, a hound's eager sniffing.

*Please keep him away from me! he begged.*

An edge of the chute stirred. Now there was an eager whining. Something crept toward him under the cloth.

"Go away!" he croaked.

Through the blurred vision of his one eye, Trent saw a brown and white head—very like Eagle's. It bent toward something. With a sick feeling, Trent realized that the *something* was one of his own outstretched, virus-filled hands. He saw a pink tongue come out, lick the hand, but could not feel it. He tried to move and unconsciousness overwhelmed him. One last thought flitted through his

mind before the darkness came—

*"Each man kills the thing he . . ."*

There was a bed beneath him—soft, sleep-lulling. In one part of his mind he knew a long time had passed. There had been hands, needles, wheeled carts taking him places, liquids in his mouth, tubes in his veins. He opened his eyes. Green walls, glaring white sunshine partially diffused by louver shutters, a glimpse of blue-green hills outside.

"You are feeling better?" The voice had the peculiar whistling aspiration of the Vegan vocals.

Trent shifted his gaze to the right. Ger! The Vegan stood beside the bed, deceptively Earth-human in appearance. His shutter-like eye membranes were opened wide, the double crest of feathery hair retracted. He wore a yellow robe belted at the waist.

"How long . . ."

The Vegan put a seven-fingered hand on Trent's wrist, felt the pulse. "Yes, you are feeling much better. You have been very ill for almost four of your months."

"Then the dogs are all dead," said Trent, his voice flat.

"Dead?" Ger's eye membranes flicked closed, opened.

"I killed them," said Trent. "My body's loaded with dormant virus."

"No," said the Vegan. "We gave the dogs an extra white blood cell—more predatory. Your puny virus could not survive it."

Trent tried to sit up, but Ger restrained him. "Please, Varley. You are not yet recovered."

"But if the dogs are immune to the virus . . ." He shook his head. "Give me a shipload of dogs and you can name your own price."

"Varley, I did not say dogs are immune. They . . . are . . . not like dogs exactly. We cannot give you a shipload of your animals because we do not have them. They were sacrificed in our work."

Trent stared at him.

"I have unfortunate news, my friend. We have made our planet restricted to humans. You may live out your life here, but you may not communicate with your fellows."

"Is that why your ship fired on me?"

"We thought it was an Earth vessel coming to investigate."

"But . . ."

"It is regrettable that



yourself must be kept here, Varley, but the pride of our peoples is at stake."

"Pride?"

The Vegan looked at the floor. "We, who have never failed a bio-physical alteration . . ." He shook his head.

"What happened?"

The Vegan's face went blue with embarrassment.

Trent recalled his first awakening on this planet. "When I recovered consciousness I saw a dog. At least I saw its head."

Ger pulled a wicker chair close to the bed, sat down. "Varley, we tried to combine the best elements of our own *progoas* and the Earth dogs."

"Well, wasn't that what you were supposed to do?"

"Yes, but in the process we lost all of the dogs you sent us and the resultant animals . . ." He shrugged.

"What are they?"

"They do not have a scaly tail or horned snout. For centuries we have been telling the Universe that sentient pets of the highest quality must show these characteristics of our own *progoas*."

"Aren't the new animals intelligent and loyal? Do they have as good hearing, sense of smell?"

"If anything, these charac-

teristics have been heightened."

He paused. "You realize, though, that this animal is not truly a dog."

"Not truly a . . ."

"It's fully serviceable . . ."

Trent swallowed. "Then you can name your own price."

"When we made our first cross, the *mikeses* fertilization process united an open *progoa* cell with a dog cell, but a series of peculiar linkages occurred. They were not what we had come to expect from our readings and from what you had told us.

Trent took a deep breath, exhaled slowly.

"It was as though the gene pattern of dog characteristics were predatory, tying down tightly even with *progoa* dominants," said Ger. "Each time we repeated the process, the same thing occurred. From our knowledge of terrestrial biology, this should not have been. The blood chemistry of our animals is based on the element you call copper. We have not much iron on our planet, but what few of your type of animals we had proved to us that the copper-basic was dominant in a *mikeses* cross. Of course, without a *mikeses* generator, cells cannot be opened to per-

mit such a cross, but still . . ."

Trent closed his eyes, opened them. "No one else will ever hear what I am about to tell you . . ." He hesitated.

Vertical lines of thoughtfulness appeared in the Vegan's cheeks. "Yes?"

"When I was here on the survey trip, I copied the diagram of a *mikeses* generator. I was able to build a working model on Earth. With it, I developed a line of hounds." He wet his lips with his tongue. "We have life on Earth with blood of copper-base chemistry. The common squid of our oceans is one of them."

Ger lowered his chin, continued to stare at Trent.

"With the generator, I linked the canine dominants of my dogs with a recessive of squid."

"But they could not breed naturally. They . . ."

"Of course not. The hounds I sent you were from a line which had no fathers for six generations. I fertilized them with the generator. They had only the female side, open to the first linkage which presented itself."

"Why?"

"Because, from my observations of *progoas*, I knew dogs were superior, but could profit by such a cross. I hoped to

make that cross myself."

The Vegan looked at the floor. "Varley, it pains me, but I am faced with the evidence that your claim is true. However, the pride of my world would never permit this to be known. Perhaps the Elders should reconsider."

"You know me," said Trent. "You have my word on it."

Ger nodded. "It is as you say, Varley. I know you." He preened a feather crest with three fingers. "And through knowing you, perhaps I have tempered the pride which rules my world." He nodded to himself. "I, too, will remain silent." A subtle Vegan smile flitted across his face, disappeared.

Trent recalled the beagle head he had seen under the parachute when he'd recovered consciousness. "I'd like to see one of these animals."

"That can be . . ." Ger was interrupted by the near baying of a pack of hounds. He stood up, flung open the window louvres, returned to support Trent's head. "Look out there, friend Varley."

On the blue-green Vegan plain, Trent could see a pack of hounds coursing in pursuit of a herd of runaway *ichikas*. The hounds had the familiar beagle head, brown and white fur. All had six legs. **THE END**

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